AN OCEAN TRAMP

Books by William McFee

ALIENS
AN OCEAN TRAMP
CAPTAIN MACEDOINE'S DAUGHTER
CASUALS OF THE SEA
PORT SAID MISCELLANY

An Ocean Tramp

By

William McFee

Garden City, N. Y., and Toronto
Doubleday, Page & Company
1921

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PRINTED AT GARDEN CITY, N. Y., U. S. A.

TO

A——— R———

"She was lovable, and he loved her. But he was not lovable, and she did not love him."

—HEINE'S *Reisebilder*

PREFACE TO THE 1921 EDITION

In the original preface to the First Edition, it will be seen that by a perfectly justifiable stroke of artistic manipulation, the writer of the letters, the Ocean Tramp himself, is drowned at sea. Neither author nor publisher had offered any guarantee that the book was a record of cold facts, and it was not deemed necessary at that time to disillusion any of the public who saw fit to send in condolences upon the tragic end of a promising career. Nevertheless, the book was faithful enough in a larger sense, for the young man who wrote it had undoubtedly died and buried himself in its pages. His place, it appeared presently, was taken by a cynical person who voyaged all over the seven seas in various steamers, accumulating immense stocks of local colour, passing through the divers experiences which befall sailor-men, reading a good many books, and gradually assuming the *rôle* of an amused spectator. Of this person, however, there is no need to speak just now, and we must go back to the time when the author, in that condition known to the cloth as "out of a ship," arrived in London, the following pages tied up in a piece of

bunting, in his dunnage, and took a small suite of chambers over the ancient gate of Cliffords Inn. Now it would be easy enough, and the temptation is great, to convey the impression that the writer had arrived in the Metropolis to make his name and win fame and fortune with his manuscript. So runs the tale in many a novel issued during the last twenty-five years. It is time, therefore, to invent something new. The penniless law-student who writes a best seller and wins the love of a celebrated actress must make way for a sea-going engineer with a year's wages and a volume of essays in his pocket, and who had not succeeded in winning the love of anybody. Indeed the singular moderation of the demands of this young man will be appreciated by any one who has been afflicted with ambition, for he has never at any time desired either to write a play, edit a magazine, or marry a prima-donna. At the particular juncture when he took over the little suite of furnished chambers from a young newspaper man who had received a sudden invitation to visit a rich uncle, his principal preoccupation was to pass his examination for his certificate of competency as a first-class engineer. To this end he began a mysterious existence possible only to the skilled Londoner. For the benefit of those who are not skilled Londoners, the following description may evoke interest.

In the morning on waking, he saw, through the small bowed window which looked out into the Inn, the sunlight shining upon the gilded gothic roof of the Rolls Building and possibly touching the tops of the trees of the grimy enclosure. Stepping through into the front room he could lean out of a mullioned affair below which he could read the date carved in the stone—1472—and looking up a long narrow court he could watch the morning traffic of the Strand passing the farther end like the film of a cinematograph. Down below, a gentleman who sold studs, shoe-laces, and dying pigs on the curb, and who kept his stock in a cupboard under the arch, was preparing to start out for the day. A dying pig, it may be mentioned, was a toy much in demand among stock-broking clerks and other frivolous young gentlemen in the City, and consisted of a bladder shaped like a pig whose snout contained a whistle which gave out on deflation an almost human note of anguish. Should the hour be before eight, which was probable since the author had contracted the habit, at sea, of rising at four, he would be further exhilarated by seeing his landlord, Mr. Honeyball, in a tightly buttoned frock-coat and wide-awake hat, march with an erect and military air to the end of the passage, dart a piercing glance in either direction, and remain, hands behind back and shoulders squared, taking the

air. Which meant that Mrs. Honeyball was engaged in the dark and dungeon-like kitchen below the worn flags of the archway, preparing the coffee and bacon for Mr. Honeyball's breakfast.

Having washed and shaved—and here it may be set down, for the benefit of Americans and others not skilled in metropolitan existence, that when a building bears over its archway the date 1472 the bathing arrangements within will not be of the most modern design—the author then took his pipe, tobacco, and cane and prepared to descend the winding stone stairway which ended in a door of heavy wood. This contrivance opened directly upon the small triangular chamber where Mrs. Honeyball each day laid the meals for herself and husband, transacted her rent-collecting, and received occasional visitors during late afternoon, self-effacing ladies of mature age who seemed to shrink back into the panelling behind them and who assumed the anxious immobility of figures in high relief, if the phrase may be allowed to pass. At this early hour, however, no one is in sight save Mrs. Honeyball herself, a slight elderly person with that look of pink beatification on her face which accompanies some forms of Christianity, emerging from another door which leads down a curved stairway to subterranean regions. Mrs. Honeyball, it may be stated in parenthesis, is of the great family of

hero-worshippers, women who are inspired with an indomitable and quite illogical faith in the wisdom and strength of their gentlemen friends. The mere fact of the author being a nautical character is sufficient for Mrs. Honeyball. Beyond going as far as Margate on the *Clacton Belle*, a fat, squab-shaped side-wheel affair very popular with London folk in that era, Mrs. Honeyball's acquaintance with the sea is purely theoretical. To her all seafaring men are courageous, simple-hearted stalwarts having their business in great waters, and she has intimated that she always remembers them in her prayers. The modest breakfast, for two, is spread on one side of the round table which is so much too large for the room. She would be only too pleased if she could board me, but it is not allowed. The Inn, I have been given to understand, has been bought outright by some person of great wealth, whose design is to pull it down and erect a block of apartments. Mrs. Honeyball is somewhat afraid of this person. She gets in a great flutter, about the twentieth of the month, over her accounts. Just now, however, she is placidly benevolent and hopes that author has slept well. He has and says so, and opening the outer door, an immense portal of heavy wood studded with big black nails, he steps down into the archway, where Mr. Honeyball is encountered. Mr. Honeyball has been in the

army, has retired on a sergeant-major's pension after twenty-three years service' and he salutes the author in correct military fashion.

These amenities concluded and watches compared with the great clock of the Law Courts visible from the end of the passage, the author turned westward and set off briskly toward Charing Cross, buying a paper on the way, and noting from time to time the attractively attired young ladies who were hurrying to their various employments. At the risk of evoking a certain conventional incredulity in the readers' bosom, the author is constrained to point out that he harboured only the purest and most abstract sentiments towards these young women. There is a period in the life of the literary artist, unhappily not permanent, when the surface of his mind may be described as absorbent of emotional influences, a period which results in the accumulation of vast quantities of data concerning women without to any degree destroying the authentic simplicity of his heart. And when the point of saturation is reached, to use an engineer's phrase, the artist, still preserving his own innocence, begins to produce. And this, one may remark in passing, is the happiest time of his life! He combines the felicity of youth, the wisdom of age, and the unencumbered vitality of manhood. He knows, even while in love, as he frequently is at such periods,

that there are loftier peaks beyond, mountain-ranges of emotion up which some day he is destined to travel, and he disregards the pathetic seductions of those who would bid him settle in their quiet valleys.

Arriving in the neighbourhood of Charing Cross, the author takes an affectionate glimpse into Trafalgar Square, and turns down a steep, narrow street, leading towards the River, where is situated a small eating house. At that time, it should be observed, almost the only way for a stranger to obtain a breakfast in London was to go to a hotel and engage a room. Even at railroad terminals, where the refreshment-rooms were just beginning to be swept and garnished, and the waitresses were yawning behind the big urns, they did not regard the famished traveller with any enthusiasm. It was felt that a stranger wanting food at that hour had been up to no good. The author, being a skilled Londoner, was put to no such inconvenience. It was his habit, at intervals, to write special articles for the London papers, articles which had to be delivered to the night commissionaire on duty in the office of the newspaper. The particular functionary employed by the *News* was a social being and fond of port, and over a dock-glass at Finches, the celebrated bar in Fleet Street, had recommended a certain chop-house where night-birds ate before retiring to their nests in distant suburbs. To this

hostelry the author therefore repairs, down the narrow declivity, in at the door whose brass handles are being vigorously polished by a youth in a green baize apron, and upstairs to a long low chamber furnished with small tables. Here one discovers some half-dozen strays from the millions of Londoners who breakfast in orthodox fashion—in the secrecy and sullen silence of their own homes. And the salient feature of the people in this upstairs room is the inexorable isolation of their souls. No one speaks. One or two look up from their food as the author makes his way to the window from which he commands a glimpse of blue sky, the elevation of an enormous brick wall, and possibly a locomotive having its firebox cleaned on a siding and panting as though afflicted with lung trouble. He takes his seat not far from a young woman who is breakfasting on a bun and a glass of milk. She is reading a book, a fat novel in fine print, the covers soiled with food and the corners grimy with years of friction. She is there every morning eating a bun and drinking a glass of milk. She has a clear, delicate face, blonde hair, and large black eyes. Her hands are fine, too, though they might be better kept. One suspects she does her own washing after she gets home at night.

The reader may possibly wonder why the author should lower himself in the esteem of men by dilating

upon the appearance of a stray young woman whom fate had washed up on the shores of time near him and whom the next wave would inevitably bear away again. But the reader must exercise a little patience. Several women appear in this preface, and the author imagines they may reveal to the reader something of the mentality which wrote this book. A mentality somewhat alien to the English, since it was profoundly interested in women without incurring any suspicion of French naughtiness, or endeavouring in any way to make itself pleasing to them. A mentality hampered by an almost hysterical shyness which, however, was capable of swift and complete evaporation in certain circumstances.

So far, let it be premised, the shyness was still in evidence, and the author became as silent and austere as the other members of the company. There was a youth, in trousers obviously pressed under his mattress, and a coat too short for him, whose air of shabby smartness brought tears to the eyes of the author, who had passed through very much the same purgatory years before. Indeed it was very much like a coffee room in purgatory, if the reader can imagine such a thing, for every one of the patrons had this distinguishing trait—they were shackled and tortured and seared by the lack of a little money. The mangy old waif who asked for a cup of tea and furtively

fished out of a little black oil-cloth bag a couple of thick sandwiches; the middle-aged person with a fine moustache, frock-coat, and silk-hat, who ordered coffee and bacon and eggs, and forgot to eat while his tired eyes fixed themselves with insane intensity upon a mineral-water advertisement on the opposite wall; the foreign lady (whom the author hastens to record as a virtuous matron) whose bizarre hat and brightly painted cheeks were stowed away in an obscure and lonely corner where she pored over a Greek newspaper; the middle-aged gentleman whose marbled note-book was filled with incredibly fine writing and columns of figures which ought to have meant something substantial, but which were probably only lists of bad debts utterly uncollectable—all these poor people would have been carried up to heaven had they suddenly discovered under their plates a twenty-pound note. And the desire to do this thing, to play the rich uncle for once, was at times so keen that the author felt himself in purgatory, too, in a way, and lost his appetite thinking about it.

The reader may opine that such a meal would be but a poor preliminary for a morning of study, but the fact remains that the contemplation of misery stimulates one's mental perceptions. Once more out in the Strand, having watched the young woman descend the narrow street and fling a swift glance over

her shoulder as she turned into Northumberland Avenue, the author mounted a Barking 'bus and settled himself in the front seat, a gay little Union Jack fluttering just above his head, and gave himself up unreservedly to reflections evoked by a return, after some years at sea, to his native air. Every foot of the way eastward brought up memories long dormant beneath the swarms of alien impressions received since going to sea, impressions that ranged from the songs of an octaroon in a blind-tiger back of Oglethorpe Avenue in Savannah, to the mellow *Boom-cling-clang* of temple-bells heard in the flawless dawn from a verandah above the sampan-cluttered canals of Osaka. Between his nostrils and the ancient odours of creosote blocks and of river mud drying at low tide came the heavy scent of Arab quarters, the reek of Argentine slaughter-houses and the subtle pervasions of Singapore. Since he had read with careless neglect the familiar names over familiar shops where he and his father had dealt in the common things of life, his eyes had ached with the glittering hieroglyphics of Chinatown and the incomprehensible futilities of Armenian and Cyrillic announcements. So it came about that he regarded the cheerful, homely, and sun-lit Strand with extraordinary delight, a delight enhanced by the incorrigible conviction that in a few weeks he would quit it

once more for distant shores. Yet the charm, evanescent as it was, laid an authentic hand upon his pulse and made it beat more quickly. Here he had bought his first dress-suit. The tailor's shop was gone and a restaurant with bulging glass windows thrust out a portly stomach into the street. Here again he had lunched in days gone by on Saturdays, and loitered far into the afternoon to flirt with the waitress. Here, where Wellington Street plunged across and flung itself upon Waterloo Bridge, one beheld staggering changes. The mountainous motor bus put on speed and scampered past the churches left like rocky islets in the midst of a swift river of traffic. Once past Temple Bar and in the narrow defile of Fleet Street the author's thoughts darted up Fetter Lane and hovered around a grimy building where he had pursued his studies with the relentless fanaticism of youthful ambition. There, under the lamp-post at the corner, one keen evening in early spring, he had what was for him a tremendous emotional experience. In the German class (for he was all for *Wilhelm Meister*, *Faust*, *The Robbers*, and *Dichtung und Wahrheit* in those days) was a German girl learning English, a robust, vital, brown-haired wench from Stuttgart. Often when it came to his turn to read from the set piece of literature, he felt this girl's eyes upon him and he would raise his own to find her

regarding him with a steady, appraising glance. And yet she seemed to vanish effectively enough in the general confusion of departure. Once she picked up his pencil and asked mutely for the use of it, and he assented with what he knew was a fiery blush. She replaced it with a firm nod of the head and her steady glance. For a few days the thought of her bothered his dreams and then, in the fanatical pursuit of knowledge, the mood evaporated. Perhaps she was aware of this and laid her plans accordingly, for on the last evening of the session, as he came down the steps of the college and turned toward Fetter Lane, he saw her standing under the lamp-post at the corner. A frightful predicament! It was one thing to read about Johann Wolfgang Goethe and his free emotional development, about Arthur Schopenhauer living in Venice with his mistress and writing philosophical works, or to approve the newly translated vapourings of Frederick Nietzsche. It was quite another to walk steadily onward and encounter a robust, vital, brown-haired wench from Stuttgart who stood waiting with unmistakable invitation in her pose. When he arrived at the corner he was in a condition bordering on blind panic and he heard, as through a thick wall, a hoarse, musical voice murmur unintelligible words. He heard himself murmur something which brought a look of angry astonish-

ment into her eyes. He heard the words "Don't you like me?" far off, drowned by a buzzing of the blood in his ear-drums. And then a vicious thrust forward of the blonde head, a show of big white teeth, and the contemptuous phrase "Nassty you are!" as she flung round and hurried down the street.

No doubt she was right. Often, in the night-watches at sea, the author has recalled the vitality of her appeal, the genuine frankness of her character, and wished for an opportunity to express his regret for his *gaucherie* and offer adequate amends. And as the 'bus lumbers along towards Ludgate Hill he thinks of her and wonders precisely what purpose these fugitive and fortuitous encounters serve. These futile yet fascinating conjectures bring him past Saint Paul's, in whose shadow he has spent many hours reading old books at the stalls in Holywell Street, and the 'bus races along Cannon Street, is brought up almost on its hind wheels at the Mansion House Corner, and the author gets a brief glimpse of Princes Street and Moorgate Street, where he was once "something in the City" as we used to say, before the policeman's hand is lowered and the east-bound traffic roars along Threadneedle Street and so down to Aldgate, where the author descends by the famous Pump, to begin the serious business of the day. For it must not be forgotten that this daily

'bus-ride from Charing Cross to Aldgate Pump is not prosecuted in a spirit of sentimental reverie. The author is going to school. Across the road may be seen a building athwart whose topmost window runs a tarnished gold sign *Teague's School of Engineering*, only all three *n*s of the last word are missing, which seems in keeping with the name Teague somehow, and gives the whole affair a touch of Irish dissipation. Nothing, however, could be more misleading. Upstairs, four flights, the last two uncarpeted or linoleumed, one discovers only an austere establishment from which both Teague and his possible dissipation are long since departed. The business is now owned by a dapper young man of pleasing exterior and almost uncanny technical omniscience, who for a lump inclusive fee undertakes to pull the most illiterate of seafarers through the narrow portals of the government examination. He gives that impression as he sits at his desk in his private office, the cuffs of his grey frock-coat and his starched white shirt drawn up out of the way. He has the capable air of a surgeon, the swift, impersonal competence of an experienced *accoucheur*. His business is to get results. It is not too much to say that he gets them.

In the room beyond, however, in which the author takes his seat in the humble capacity of student, there is the curiously strained atmosphere that is to

be found in all companies of disparate personalities intent upon a common end. Seated in rows at a number of pine desks are a score of men whose ages range from twenty-three to forty-five. Some are smoking. Others, with tongue protruding slightly from the corner of the mouth, and head on one side, are slowly and painfully copying the drawing of a pump or a valve-box. Others, again, are in the murky depths of vast arithmetical solutions extracting, with heavy breathings, the cube root from some formidable quantity, and bringing it to the surface exhausted and far from certain as to the ultimate utility of their discoveries. They have come from the far ends of the sea-lanes, these men, from Niger River ports and the coast towns of China, from lordly liners and humble tramps, from the frozen fjords of Älborg and the crowded tideways of the Hooghley. They are extraordinarily unprepossessing, most of them, for the time was not yet when sea-going was considered, save as a last resource, like selling newspapers or going to America. These men were mostly artisans, thick-fingered mechanics who had gone to sea, driven by some obscure urge or prosaic economic necessity, and the sea had changed them, as it changes everything, fashioning in them a blunt work-a-day fatalism and a strong, coarse-fibred character admirably adapted to their way of life. But that way is far

from schools and colleges. They lack that subtle academical atmosphere so essential to genuine culture. They have none of them what the educated classes call an examination brain. They resemble a pack of sheep-dogs in a parlour. They accept with pathetic fidelity the dogmas of their text-books, and they submit humbly to incarceration while their heads are loaded down with formulas and theories, most of which they jettison with relief when they feel the first faint lift of the vessel to the ocean swell outside the breakwater.

But it should on no account be assumed from the above truthful estimate of their mentality that these men are to be dismissed as mere factory hands or negligible land-failures. The sea has her own way of making men, and informs them, as the years and miles go by, with a species of differential intuition, a flexible mental mechanism which calibrates and registers with astonishing accuracy and speed. They become profound judges of human character within the rough walls of their experience, and for women they betray a highly specialized esteem. . . .

For all that, as they sit here in their extremely respectable blue serge suits, which still show the sharp creases where they were laid away in unskillful folds during the voyage, they give one an impression of lugubrious failure. It must be confessed that

simple as the examinations are they are beyond the range of many of us. The habits of study are not easily retained during the long stretches of watch-keeping intermitted with hilarious trips ashore. We find a great difficulty in keeping our minds on the problems set down. Outside is a blue sky, the roar of traffic at the confluence of four great thoroughfares, and the call of London, a very siren among cities, when one knows! Over yonder, a cigarette in his mouth, his head on his hand and his elbow asprawl on the desk, making idle marks with a pencil, is a youth who is nursing a grievance against the government. He has been up eight times and failed every time. He is going up again with us next Tuesday. Yet, as it has been whispered to me during lunch hour by my neighbour, a robust individual just home from Rangoon, he is a first-class man; just the chap in a break-down; always on the job; fine record. There is another, between us and the sectional model of a feed pump valve, who never looks up, but figures unceasingly with elbows close to his sides, his toes turned in, the nape of an obstinate, close-cropped neck glistening pale gold and pink in the morning sun. Without having been to sea with this party or even having seen his face, one is aware that he will always be found with his pale eyes wide open when the light is flicked on at One Bell. He has been sometime

in tramp-steamers, who carry no oilers, for there is a hard callous on the knuckle of his right forefinger where the oil-feeder handle has been chafing. Whether he would be a tower of strength in a smash-up is not so easily divined. Next to him a young gentleman is sitting sideways smoking, a pair of handsome cuff-buttons of Indian design flashing at his wrists. He is, my neighbour has informed me during lunch, from the P. & O. and he corroborates this by asking a question of the lecturer concerning a broken valve-spindle of enormous dimensions. He stands for class in our community and gives a certain tone to the group who go up on Tuesday. Unhappily he falls out on the second day, owing to certain defects in his arithmetic, and disappears. No doubt he has gone to another sea-port to try a less austere examiner.

And after lunch, the principal of Teague's School of Engineering suddenly emerges from his private office, hangs up a card labelled "*No Smoking during Lectures*" and proceeds to feed us with the irreducible minimum of information necessary for our ordeal. By long practice, astute contriving, and careful cross-examination of successful pupils he has arrived at such a pass that he seems to know more about the examiner's mind than that gentleman himself. He repeats slowly and deliberately the exact form of

answer which is most likely to draw approval from the grand inquisitor, and we copy it down hastily in our notes. The sleeves of his grey frock-coat are pulled back to keep the chalk dust from soiling them as he rapidly sketches on the board for our edification. We listen with respect, for we know he has been through precisely the same mill as ourselves, he has come on watch at midnight with his mouth dry and his eye-lids sagging and wishing in his heart he were dead. He has won out and now stands ready to show us the way. We listen to every word. The lecture is short, sharp, apposite, a model of all a lecture should be, stripped to the bare bones of fundamental truth, pared clean of every redundant word. As the clock strikes three he claps his hands to rid them of chalk, pauses for a moment to answer pertinent questions, and vanishes into his office once more.

Most of us go home.

The author now has an assignation with a lady, and the reader who has been patiently waiting for some sort of literary allusions in a preface to a volume of literary essays, is about to be gratified. The scene changes from the vulgar uproar of Aldgate to a flat in Chelsea. Hurrying through Houndsditch, across Leadenhall Street and up St. Mary Axe, the author discovers the right 'bus in Broad Street about to start. They are filling the radiator with water and the con-

ductor is intoning a mysterious incantation which resolves itself into "*Benk! Oobun, Benk! Piccadilly, 'Yde Pawk, Sloon Stree', Sloon Square, Kings Road, Chelsea an' Walham Green. Here y' are, lidy.*" With long practice he can make the vowels reverberate above the roar of the traffic. The words *Benk* and *Pawk* come from his diaphragm in sullen booms. To listen to him is a lesson in prosody. He enjoys doing it. He is an artist. [He extracts the uttermost from his material, which is the mark of the supreme artist.] He unbends when he comes up to collect the fares from the author and a lady who is probably returning to Turnham Green after a visit to her married daughter at Islington, and he leans over the author's shoulder to scan the racing news in the Stop Press Column, a courtesy as little likely to be withheld in London as a light for a cigarette in Alexandria. "Hm!" he murmurs, stoically. "Jes' fancy! An' I had 'im backed for a place, too. That's the larst money I lose on *that* stable." He clatters down again and one hears his voice lifted once more as he rumbles: "*Benk—Ooborn Benk!*" with diaphragmatic intensity.

To know London from the top of a 'bus is no doubt a liberal education, but it may be questioned whether the tuition is as extensive and peculiar with a gasoline-driven vehicle as with the old horse-hauled affairs

that took all day to jungle along from the North Pole Inn at Wormwood Scrubbs to the Mile End Road, or from the Angel at Islington to Roehampton. Almost before the author has digested a leading article dealing with the Venezuelan Question the 'bus roars down Sloan Street, shoots across the Square, and draws up just where a few people are already collecting by the pit-doors of the Court Theatre for the evening performance of "Man and Superman." This being the end of a stage, if the pleasantry may be pardoned, the author descends and walks onward to his destination, which is a flat down by the River.

There are certain thoroughfares in London which have always avoided any suspicion of respectable regularity either in their reputation or their architecture. The dead monotony of Woburn or Eaton Square, for example, the massive austerity of the Cromwell Road, and the cliff-like cornices of Victoria Street, are the antithesis of the extraordinary variety to be found in Park Lane, High Street Kensington, Maida Vale and Cheyne Walk. This last reveals, between Blantyre and Tite streets, the whole social order of England and the most disconcerting divarications of design. In it meet democracy, plutocracy, and aristocracy, artist and artisan, trade and tradition, philosophy and philistinism, publicans and

publicists, connoisseurs and confidence men, sin and sincerity. It is not proposed to introduce the reader to the whole of this goodly company. The Balzac of Chelsea still tarries in obscurity. By some amazing oversight this street, which has sheltered more artists and authors than any other thoroughfare in the world, seems to have evaded their capture. Chelsea is a cosmos. Cheyne Walk is a world, a world abandoned by genius to the cheap purveyors of second-hand clap-trap and imitators of original minds.

Let us go upstairs.

Miss Flaherty is one of those women who appear from time to time in the newspaper world and who seem to embody in their own personalities the essential differences between journalism and literature. Their equipment is trivial and their industry colossal. In a literary sense they are so prolific that they do not beget; they spawn. They present a marvellous combination of unquenchable enthusiasm and slovenly inaccuracy. They needs must love the highest when they see it, but they are congenitally incapable of describing it correctly. Their conception of art consists of writing a book describing their own sexual impulses. This is frequently so ungrammatical and obscure that even publishers' readers balk at it, and it goes the rounds. In the meanwhile, they produce in incredible quantity of daily and weekly matter for

the press. They wheedle commissions out of male editors by appealing to their sex, and write sprightly articles on Bachelor Girls and their Ideals, and the Economic Independence of the Married Woman. They become hysterically lachrymose, in print, over a romantic love affair, and relapse into sordid intrigues on the sly. They demand political power without intending for a single moment to assume political responsibility. Their days are about equally divided between catching a husband and achieving what they describe as "a scoop."

To all this Miss Flaherty adds an unusual faculty for spectacular antics. She has dressed in a red sweater and plied her trade, for a day, as a shoe-shine boy. She has dressed in a green cloak and sold shamrock on St. Patrick's day. She has dressed in rags and sung in the streets for charity. She has hired a van and ridden about the suburbs pretending to sell domestic articles. She has attended revival meetings and thrown herself in a spasm of ecstasy upon what she calls the mercy-seat. She has . . .

But the author is not absolutely sure whether she has . . . after all. He is of the opinion that, like most English women, she has no talent for that sort of thing. Like most young women who babble of emancipation she has an unsuspected aptitude for domesticity. She makes tea far better than she

writes articles. She is, under a ridiculous assumption of slangy modernity, oppressively conventional.

However, the author's immediate concern is not with Miss Flaherty's destiny at all, but with his manuscript which she has been commissioned to place with a publisher. A writer of dime novels, on being consulted as to the way to get a book published, said he didn't know, never having had a book to publish save in weekly serial numbers; and that, he hastened to observe, was quite another story. And then suddenly remarked, slapping his thigh and reaching for the makings of a fresh cigarette: "Why not try Imogene Flaherty? She's anxious to start in as author's agent." The author had no objections to raise beyond the fact that he disliked doing business with women and was afraid of anybody named Imogene. The dime-novelist shook his head and said women in business and journalism had come to stay. And seriously, Miss Flaherty might easily be of immense assistance to the author. "Very nice girl, too —h-m—hm!" This reminiscently. "Very decent little woman. Go and see her—take my card—down in Cheyne Walk. She had a flat down there near Church Street. H-m. Yes."

So it happened. And the result had been an explosion. Miss Flaherty had accepted the commission and had read the manuscript and had, in common

parlance, gone up in the air. Her enthusiasm literally knew no bounds. She did not actually foam at the mouth, but she displayed all the symptoms of advanced literary hysteria. Now there is this to be said for the sea—it may not furnish one with universal judgments about women but it does provide the solitude and austere discipline which enable a man to coördinate his hitherto chaotic ideas about them. And women, if they only knew how they appear to the imagination of men on the rolling waters, would undoubtedly modify their own conceptions of life, and possibly profit by the change. Imogene, however, had no such moment of illumination. She lived in an enchanted world of imitation emotion and something in the author's manuscript had set her off, had appealed to her rudimentary notions of fine writing, and engendered a flame of enthusiasm. It is not too much to say that she believed in that manuscript much more than the author did. That is the correct attitude for a successful agent. Imogene did not "push" the book, as salesmen say, so much as herald it. She entered publishers' offices like a prophetess or one of the seraphim, panoplied in shining plumage, blinding the poor human eyes with beams of heavenly radiance, the marvellous manuscript, like a roll of lost gospels, held out before her. She blew a blast on her trumpet

and the doors of the publishers' readers swung wide. No knowledge of English literature prevented her from uttering her solemn conviction that here was the greatest book since Geoffrey Chaucer laid down his pen. With intrepid resource she warned the hesitating publisher that he would have none save himself to blame if he missed this chance of immortalizing his house, and eventually a publisher was discovered who was willing to issue the book at the author's expense. All this, let it be said with regret, did not bring a blush to the author's sea-tanned cheek. On the contrary, he cherished a secret apprehension that Imogene had gone mad.

The one fly in the ointment at this juncture was the author's unmannerly attitude towards publishers who issued books at the writer's expense. He went so far as to characterize them as crooks and declined to have anything to do with them. He had been writing for a good many years of apprenticeship and had arrived at the conclusion that a man might get along in decent comfort all his life without publishing anything at all, if fate so ordered it; and the suggestion that he pay away his hoarded sea-wages just to have his name on a book, clouded a naturally sunny temper for some time.

Here, however, sitting at tea in the intensely artistic flat on the third floor over a grocery-store, and

looking out upon the River and the warehouses of the Surrey Side, the author is rapturously apprised that the book is as good as sold. A publisher's reader, a representative of an important house, has declared that the book has distinction. This is a true record, in the main, and the author is obliged to confess, thirteen years later, that he fell for this. In his simplicity he thought it a fine thing to have distinction. And this is true. It *is* a fine thing, but the fineness of the bloom is soon licked off by the busy tongues of the Imogenes and their masculine counterparts. The author did not see this so clearly at the time. He felt as a cat feels when stroked. The patrons of distinction were also in a position to make a cash offer for the copyright. In those days, when fifty dollars a month was considered adequate remuneration for his services at sea, the author had modest notions about cash offers. He treated the matter in a sporting spirit and closed.

But it was not consummated in a word and with the gesture of signing one's name. Things are not done that way when dealing with Imogenes. One has to negotiate a continent of emotional hill-climbing and an ocean of talk. A sea-faring person, schooled to deal with men and things with an economy of effort, is moved to amazement before the spectacle of a "bachelor girl" in action. One assumes, of

course, that she intends to remain a "bachelor girl." There is the solemn initiation into the ranks of her pals. Palship, as she calls it, is something quite different from friendship, and to a man of normal instincts this is an alarming proposition. It is certainly far more exhausting than an intrigue and far less interesting than a rationally controlled friendship with a person of the same sex. And here it is pertinent to put forward what the author conceives to be the fundamental trouble with the Imogenes of both sides of the Atlantic. It is pertinent because he was, at the time of writing this book, under the influence of a very potent and inspiring friendship for a man now dead, a friendship which moulded his ideas and inspired him to hammer out for himself a characteristic philosophy of life. And one of the most important determinations of that philosophy deals with the common errors concerning friendship and love. The mistake of the bachelor girl and her prototypes lies in their failure to recognize the principle of sex as universal. It is not so much that men and women cannot meet without the problem of sex arising between them as that no two human beings can have any interchange of thoughts at all without involving each other in a complex of which masculine and feminine are the opposite poles. The most fascinating of all friendships are those in which the protagonists

alternate, each one, owing to freshly revealed depths or shallows in his character, assuming the masculine or feminine rôle. The Latin recognises this by instinct. Just as his nouns are always either masculine or feminine, so are his ideas. And his women, who have never heard of "bachelor girls" or "palship," have achieved with consummate skill all and more than the Imogenes have ever imagined. Any one who has ever enjoyed the friendship of such women will recall that subtle aroma of sex which informs the whole affair. The coarse-grained northerner is prone to attribute the abundant vitality, the exquisite graces of body and mind to a deftly concealed vampirism or sensuality. Nothing is further from the truth. If you can play up to it, if your emotions and instincts are under the control of a traditional and finely tempered will, a notable experience is yours. Friendship, in fact, is the divinity whose name must not be uttered or he will vanish. She will not inform you, as Imogene does, that you are not in love with her and she is not in love with you and therefore a palship is under way. On the contrary, she will never let you forget that love is a possibility always just out of sight, where it will always remain. She is economically independent because men cannot do without her. She has more rights than the Imogenes will gain in a thousand years; and she is, moreover,

something that men would strive to preserve in a world-cataclysm, whereas no one would give Imogene a single panic thought.

Imogene, however, has no inkling of this. She is under the impression that she is one of the world's cosmic forces. In the rag-bag of her brain whence she fishes out the innumerable formless and gaudy-coloured pilferings from which she fashions her "special articles," she cherishes an extraordinary illusion that she is a sort of modern Hypatia. She says Aspasia, but that is only because she has confused Kingsley's heroine with Pericles' mistress. She talks of "mating with an affinity" of "influencing the lives of the men who do things." She is very worried about the men who do things. It is a proof of her conventional and Victorian mentality that she imagines men who do things are inspired to do them by women; whereas it is rather the other way round, the men who do things having to avoid the majority of women as they would *cholera morbus*, if they are ever to get anything done.

Springing up on the impulse of this thought the author makes his excuses to the assembled guests and descends the dark stairway to the street. To tell the truth, these glimpses into the society of literary folk do not inspire in his bosom any frantic anxiety to abandon his own way of life. He had a furtive and

foolish notion that these people are of no importance whatever. These coteries, these at-homes, and flat philosophies are not the real thing. It sounds unsocial and unconventional, no doubt, but it is a question so far unsettled in the author's mind whether any genuine artist loves his fellows well enough to co-habit with them on a literary basis. For some mysterious reason the real men, the original living forces in literature, do not frequent the *salons* of the Imogenes. They are more likely to be found in the private bars of taverns in the King's Road, or walking along lonely roads in Essex and Surrey. Indeed, they may be preoccupied with problems quite foreign to the immediate business of literary conversation. They may be building bridges, or sailing ships, or governing principalities. They are unrecognised for the most part. The fact is they are romantic, and it is the hall-mark of the true romantic to do what other men dream of, and say nothing about it.

The motives of the author, however, in deserting the flat in Chelsea, were not entirely due to dreams of lofty achievement, but to the stern necessity to read voraciously on the subject of Heat for his examination. And one of the dominating changes which he discovers in himself after the passage of thirteen years is a sad falling off in brain-power. He is no longer able to read voraciously on the subject of Heat and

Heat-engines. His technical library remains packed with grim neatness in his cabin book-case. When his juniors bring problems involving a quadratic equation he is stricken with a horrible fear lest the answer won't come out. He looks through his old examination papers and echoes Swift's melancholy sigh "Gad! What a genius I had when I wrote all that!" Most professional men, one is bound to suppose, become aware at periods of the gradual ossification of their intellects. And it is not always easy to retain a full consciousness of the compensating advantages of seniority in the face of this positive degeneration. One begins to watch carefully for errors where one used to go pounding to a finish with a full-blooded rush. One has a feeling of being overtaken; the young people of the next decade can be heard not far behind, and they seem to be offensively successful in business, in friendship, and in love. One has ceased to be interesting to the women of thirty and the men of forty. The achievement of years shrinks to depressing dimensions, and the real test is on. One becomes uncomfortably aware of the shrewd poke of Degas that "any one can have talent at twenty-five. The great thing is to have talent at forty."

The reader is invited to assume, therefore, that the author, at twenty-five, was sufficiently talented

and ambitious to read voraciously on Heat and a great many other subjects. That he did so he calls on Mrs. Honeyball to witness, since that lady was really concerned for his health and urged him not to work too hard "for fear of a break-down." There was never any danger of a break-down, however. London was outside that window with 1472 carved below it, and at the first warning of fatigue the author would take hat and stick and fare forth in search of recreation and adventure. He would apologize to Mrs. Honeyball and her friends gathered in the little room below, where they were discussing what Mr. Honeyball described as "Christian Work." Mr. Honeyball used to bring out this phrase with extraordinary vigour and emphasis, as though the very enunciation were a blow to the designs of Satan. The author heard, during a later voyage, that the Honeyballs did eventually give up the mundane job of supervising apartments and retired to a quiet seaside town where they devoted themselves entirely to "Christian Work."

It was on one of these evening strolls that the author became on speaking terms with the girl who ate a bun and a glass of milk for breakfast every morning. It is very easy to get acquainted with a virtuous girl in England—so easy that the foreigner is frequently bewildered or inclined to be suspicious of the

virtue. It is a facility difficult to reconcile with our heavily advertised frigidity, our disconcerting habit of addressing a stranger as though some invisible third person (an enemy) just behind him were the object of our dignified disapproval. It may be explained by the fact that, from the middle classes downward, and excluding the swarms of immigrants in the large cities, we are a very old race, with a comprehensive knowledge of our own mentalities. One finds blond, blue-eyed Saxon children in East Anglia, and there are black-haired, brown-skinned people in the West Country who have had no foreign admixture to their Phoenician blood since the Norman Conquest. This makes for a certain solidarity of sentiment and a corresponding freedom of intercourse.

Not that Mabel would understand any of this if she heard it. She has a robust and coarse-textured mind curiously contrasted with her pale, delicate features and sombre black eyes. She was one of those people who seem suddenly to transmute themselves into totally different beings the moment one speaks to them. As the author did one evening, after peering absently through the window of a candy-store down near the railroad arch below Charing Cross, and seeing her sitting pensive behind the stacks of merchandise. She was very glad to see a familiar face and recognised the claim of the break-

they had been going round together, on and off, this nine months now. As for being *engaged* . . . he only got two pound a week as yet, remember. Yes, that was why she wanted him to go in for this writing and make a hit. She'd take it on and make ends meet somehow, if he did that. She could help him. He said she had some good ideas, only they wanted working out. And here was a secret—he'd written a play! Mabel leaned over the candy jars and whispered this dreadful thing in the author's ear. A friend of theirs had seen it—he was at one of the theatres in the electrical department and knew all the stars—and he said it was very good but needed what he called pulling together! If only a reliable person in the play-writing line could be found to do this pulling together, there might be a fortune in it.

The reader may be disturbed at Mabel's insistence upon the financial possibilities of literature, but in this she was only a child of her time. The point worthy of note is not her rapacity but the dexterity with which she utilized literature to further her ambition. She was identifying herself with literature and so fortifying her position. She was really far better fitted to be the wife of a fictionist than Imogene. And she could appreciate poetry addressed to herself. The author eventually saw some of it for a moment, written on sermon paper, but the

stanzas shall remain forever vibrating in his own bosom. She is memorable to the author, moreover, in that she brought home to him for the first time the startling fact that every such woman is, in a sense, an adventuress. She never knows what will happen next. She is in the grip of incalculable forces. She has to work with feverish haste to make herself secure and to use even such bizarre instruments as literature in the pursuit of safety. Back in his tiny chambers over the old Gate of Cliffords Inn, the author meditated darkly upon that play that only required "pulling together" to make it the nucleus of a fortune. Evidently, he reflected, there were determined characters about, aided and inspired by equally determined young women, battering upon the gates of Fame, and he felt his own chances of success against such rivals were frail indeed. So he went to sea again.

Here, in one short sentence, is the gist of this book, that the sea is a way of escape from the intolerable burden of life. A cynic once described it as having all the advantages of suicide without any of its inconveniences. To the author it was more than that. It was the means of finding himself in the world, a medium in which he could work out the dreams which beset him and which were the basis of future writings. But ever at the back of the mind will there

be the craving to get out beyond the bar, to see the hard, bright glitter of impersonal land-lights die suddenly in the fresh gusts, and to leave behind the importunate demands of business, of friendship, and of love.

> "From too much love of living
> From hope and fear set free."

The words hummed in his brain as he ascended the stone stairs of the gaunt building in Mark Lane to face the final ordeal of a *viva voce* examination before the Head Examiner. There had been a hurried consultation in whispers in the great examination room. In a far corner was a glazed, portioned-off space where sat the regular examiner with a perspiring candidate in front of him, tongue-tied and weary. And there were a dozen more waiting. So the author was informed in a whisper that he had better step upstairs and the Head Examiner would deal with him. And settle his hash quickly enough, thought the author as he sprang nimbly up behind the assistant examiner. He found himself in a large, imposing office where at an immense desk sat a man with a trim beard, rapidly scanning a mass of papers. The author immediately became absorbed in the contemplation of this person, for he bore an extraordinary resemblance to George Meredith. The head in profile was like a

Sicilian antique, with the clear-cut candour of a cameo. Memories of *Lord Ormont and His Aminta* crowded upon the waiting victim and he found himself almost hysterical with curiosity as to what would happen if he claimed to be a distant connection of Sir Willoughby Patterne, but without the historic leg. What if he led the conversation gently towards Richard Feverel's perfect love-story, or alluded to a lady with whom he will always remain in love—Diana of the Crossways? But nothing of the sort happened. The author was nodded curtly to a seat, the assistant examiner chose another chair close by, cleared his throat, shot his cuffs, and pulled up the knees of his trousers. The Head Examiner, without looking up or desisting from his rapid writing, began to express his deep regret that the author apparently preferred to work an evaporator under a pressure instead of a vacuum. There might possibly be some reason for this which he, the Examiner, had overlooked, and he would appreciate it if the author could so far unbend as to outline his experience in this business. Whereupon the Head Examiner proceeded with his writing and left the author, in a state of coma, facing an expectant assistant examiner, who resembled some predatory bird only waiting for life to be extinct before falling upon the victim. Somewhat to his own surprise, however, the victim showed signs of return-

ing animation, and began to utter strange, semi-articulate noises. The Head Examiner wrote on with increasing speed; the assistant examiner, somewhat disappointed, still preserved an expectant air. The victim became more active, and astounded himself by carrying the war into the enemy's camp. He announced himself as an adherent of the pressure method. He became eloquent, describing his tribulations working an evaporator on a vacuum. But the aim of examiners apparently is not to hear what one knows but to reveal to a shocked world what one does not know. The subject was immediately changed to the advantages of multi-polar generators and the ethics of the single-wire system. The assistant examiner reluctantly resigned any thoughts of an immediate banquet upon the author's remains and assumed an attitude of charitable tolerance, much as one watches an insect's valorous struggles to get out of the molasses. The Head Examiner from time to time interjected a short, sharp question, like a lancet into the discussion, but without looking up or ceasing to write with extreme rapidity. And as time went on and the whole range of knowledge was gone over in the attempt to destroy him, the author began to wonder whether these men thought he had, like Lord Bacon, taken all knowledge for his province, whether tramp steamers carried a crew of

technical pundits, and whether there would be so many literary men and women about if they had to go through this sort of thing. And the thought of literature brought back George Meredith to mind again, only to be dismissed. It was much more like being examined by Anthony Trollope or Arnold Bennett, the author decided, than by Meredith. Appearances are misleading. The thin, classical face never roused from its down-cast repose and implacable attention. But at long last the assistant examiner shuffled his papers and remained silent for a moment, as though regretfully admitting that the victim was, within bounds, omniscient, and could not be decently tortured any longer. As an after thought, however, and glancing at the Head Examiner as he did so, he enquired whether the author had experienced any break-downs, accidents, smashes. . . .

The author had. It was a subject upon which he was an authority, having served in a ship twenty-five years old with rotten boilers and perishing frames. And all unwittingly he became reminiscent and drifted into the story of a gale in the Bristol Channel with the empty ship rolling till she showed her bilge keels, the propeller with its boss awash thrashing the sea with lunatic rage, and then the three of us swaying and sweating on the boiler-tops, a broken main-steam pipe lying under our feet. And it had to be

done, for the tide and the current were taking us up to Lundy, where half-tide rocks would soon cook our goose, as the saying is. And as he grew absorbed in the tale the author observed out of the corner of his eye that the Head Examiner's pen paused and then was gently laid down, a new expression of alertness, as though about to deliver judgment, came over the finely cut features. And presently, as it was explained how an iron collar was made and clamped about the broken pipe, and long bolts made to pass into the solid flanges of the valve below, to haul the pipe into its socket and hold it there by main force until we could get in, the Head Examiner turned in his chair, and nodded as he touched his beard lightly with one finger. It was about four in the morning when the job was finished, the author recalled, and he came up on to the wet deck, with low clouds flying past and Lundy an ominous shadow behind, while the dawn lifted beyond the Welsh Mountains and the jolly, homely lights of Swansea shone clear ahead. And as he paused and remarked that the repair proved to be effective, he saw something else in the face of the man watching him, something not seen before, something not very easy to describe. But it may be said to have marked another step in his career. Call it character, and the perception of it. Something, as the reader will see, that is only emerging in the

pages of this book. Something harsh and strong-fibred, nurtured upon coarse food and the inexorable discipline of the sea. Something that is the enemy of sloth and lies and the soft languors of love. Indeed, what the author has finally to say after all may be comprised in this—that out of his experience, which has been to a certain degree varied, he has come to the conviction that this same character, the achievement and acceptance of it, stands out as the one desirable and indispensable thing in the world, and neither fame nor wealth nor love can furnish any adequate substitute for it.]

S. S. *Turrialba*, August, 1920.

WILLIAM MCFEE.

PREFACE*

As I sit, this hot July day, by my window on the Walk, while the two streams, of traffic and of Thames, drift past me, I think of the man who was my friend, the man who loved this scene so well.

And he is dead. In my hand, as I write, lie his last written words, a hasty scribble ere the steamer left port on her voyage across the Atlantic. He is busy, as is evident by the greasy thumb-mark on the corner. He sat down in the midst of his work to send a last line to his friend. There is the inevitable joke at the expense of "his friend the Mate," that individual being in a towering passion with a certain pig which had escaped from his enclosure. This same pig, he declares, is some previous First Officer, who had been smitten by Circe for incontinence, and now wanders even from his sty! But I cannot go on in this way, for he is dead, poor lad, and I shall not see him again.

To those men who have wedded early I can never hope to explain the deep-rootedness of such a friendship as ours. It was, to me, as though my own youth

*Preface to the first edition.

were renewed in more perfect design. Never again shall I experience that exquisite delight with which one sees a youth reach post after post along the ways of life and thought, reach out eagerly to field on field of knowledge, through which one has tramped or scampered so many years before. With something of wonder, too, was I inspired to see so young a man lead a life so perfectly balanced, so exquisitely sensitive to every fine masculine influence. Possessing to an unusual degree that rare temperament which we call culture, he entered joyously into all that life offered to him, impatient only of hypocrisy and what he called "the copiously pious." Many misunderstood this phase of his character, mistaking for coarseness what was really a very fine love of honesty in thinking.

Of his antecedents I have often wished to know something, but it was his whim to treat personal details in a very general way. He would maintain obstinately that he himself was the most interesting person he had ever met, because, he would add, he knew so little about himself! When pressed, he would say, "My forefathers ploughed the soil, my father ploughed the ocean, I myself am the full corn in the ear." As to his childhood, he rarely mentioned it save in a cynical manner, indicating indisputably enough that all had not gone well.

"In the beginning," I heard him tell a religious

person, "In the beginning my mother bore me. When I was a child I was wont to bore my mother. Now we bore each other." That this was primarily intended to shock our friend's devotional sensibilities I do not doubt, but I imagine it contained some small truth all the same. I think he rather shrank from personalities, resolutely refusing even to be photographed, hating that process with an unexampled vehemence strange in one so modern and so versed in mechanical and chemical science. "I!" he would rage. "What have *I* done to merit portraiture? Have I builded a city, or painted a masterpiece, or served my country, or composed an iliad?" Again, "Better a single faulty *human* effort than the most perfect photograph ever developed."

Scanty indeed, therefore, did I find the materials with which to fashion an introduction to this book. With the exception of one or two pertinent fragments among his manuscripts, fragments more valuable to a critic than a biographer, I was unrewarded. One thing, however, was impressed upon me by my search. Here, at any rate, was a man developed to the full. Here was a man whose culture was deep and broad, whose body was inured to toil, whose hands and brains were employed in doing the world's work. I have read in books vehement denials of such a one's existence. He himself, in citing Ruskin, seemed to

be sceptical of any one man becoming a passionate thinker and a manual worker. But I have often heard him in close converse with some old shopmate, passing hour after hour in technical reminiscences and descriptions; then, upon the entrance of some artist or *litterateur*, plunge into the history of Letters or of Arts, never at a loss for authorities or original ideas, often even illuminating intellectual problems by some happy analogy with the problems of his trade, and rarely grounding on either the Scylla of overbearing conceit or the Charybdis of foolish humility.

I must insist on this fact at all events: he was not merely a clever young man of modern ideas. "London is paved and bastioned with clever young men," he would snarl. His aversion to the impossible type of cultured nonentities was almost too marked. His passion for thinking as an integral part of life placed him beyond these, among a rarer, different class of men, the lovers of solitude. It came to view in various ways, this fine quality of intellectual fibre. And, indeed, he—who had in him so much that drove him towards the fine Arts, yet could go out to earn his bread upon the waters, dwelling among those who had no glimmering of the things he cared for—was no slippered mouther of Pater and Sainte-Beuve but a strong spirit, confident in his own breadth of pinion, courageous to let Fate order his destiny.

Another outcome of my search for light was a conviction of the importance of his theory of art. I might almost say his religion of art, inasmuch as he had no traffic with anything that was not spontaneous, effervescing. To him a hammer and a chisel were actual and very real, and the plastic art appealed especially to him in its character of *smiting*. To smite from the stone, to finish with all a craftsman's cunning care—there seemed to him real joy in this; and so I think he felt the influence of art dynamically, maintaining always that the life-force is also the art-force, and remains constant throughout the ages. So, I imagine, he reasoned when he wrote the following verses, only to fling them aside to be forgotten:

An Author, Sitting to a Sculptor, Speaks His Mind.

And yet you call yourself a sculptor, sir?
You with your tape a-trailing to and fro,
Jotting down figures, frowning when I stir,
Measuring me across the shoulders, so!
And yet you are an artist, they aver,
Heir to the crown of Michelangelo?

I cannot think—eh, what? I ought to think?
How will you have me? Shall I sit at ease,
Staring at nothing thro' the eyelids' chink,
Coining new words for old philosophies?
Aye, so I sit until the pale stars wink
And vanish ere the early morning breeze.

Sculpture is dead, I say! We have no men
  To match the mighty masters of the past:
I've read, I've seen their works; the acumen
  Of Learning on their triumph I have cast.
Divine! Colossal! Tongue nor pen
  Can tell their beauty, O Iconoclast!

Ah, now you're modelling—in the soft clay!
  In that prosaic task where is the glow
Of genius, as in great Lorenzo's day,
  When, solitary in his studio,
Buonarotti, in his "terrible way,"
  Smote swift and hard the marble, blow on blow?

One moment while I ask you, earnestly,
  Where is the splendour of the Dorian gone,
The genius of him whose mastery
  Outshines the classic grace of Sicyon,
  Whose art can show Death lock'd with Life, the cry,
  The shuddering moan of poor Laocoön?

The Sculptor continues to model swiftly while the sitter remains motionless, watching him.

That's good, sir, good! I'll wait till you have done:
  We men of letters are a crabbéd race;
Often we're blind with staring at the sun;
  And when the evening stars begin their race,
We miss their beauty, we, who creep and run
  Like beetles o'er a buried Greek god's face.

I am reluctant to explain one of the main *motifs* of this young man's life as "an unfortunate love

affair." Indeed, apart from his frank avowal of the wandering fever in his blood, I am grown to believe that it was the very reverse of unfortunate for him. It brought him, as such things do, face to face with Realities, and showed him, sharply enough, that at a certain point in a man's life there is a Gate, guarded by the Fates, whose questions he must answer truthfully, or turn sadly aside into the vague thickets of an aimless existence. And never did there live a youth more sincere in his thought. I know nothing more typical of him than his resolute refusal to sit for his portrait until he had *done* something memorable. "What!" he would cry. "Why, the milkman, who, I heard, has just had twins, is more worthy of that high honour than I. He has *done* something in the world!"

And now he is dead, and doing and not doing are beyond his power. That the sea whereon he was born should bring him his death was fitting. Often he would urge his horror, not of death, but of Christian burial. To be boxed up in the midst of mummeries and lies—he would start up and pace the floor, the sweat standing on his face. Grimly enough, Fate took him at his word, flung him suddenly into eternity, the rushing of the wind his only requiem, the coastwise lights and the morning star the only watchers of his end.

To the orthodox sentiment sudden death may seem a very horrible sort of end to a promising life. But, as I sit by my window on the Walk, while the tides of Thames and traffic flow swiftly by, and the blue evening mist comes down over the river, transforming dingy wharf and factory into fairy palace and phantom battlement, it seems to me that my friend died fitly and well, in the midst of Realities, recking little that the love he thought secure had passed irrevocably from him, but never swerving in fidelity to his mistress or devotion to his friend.

The air grows chilly, and night has fallen over the river.

Chelsea.

AN OCEAN TRAMP

AN OCEAN TRAMP

I

This evening, as the Italian boatman rowed me across the harbour of Livorno, and the exquisite loveliness of the night enfolded me, I thought of you. It may be that the long curving line of lights which marked the *Molo Nuovo* reminded me of the Embankment by our windows, and so carried my mind on to him who waits for his *Vanderdecken* to return. Around me loomed the hulls of many steamers, their dark sides relieved by glowing port-holes, while across the water came the hoarse calls of the boatmen, the sound of oars, music, and the light laughter of women. Far down the harbour, near the Castello, a steamer's winches rattled and roared in irregular gusts of noise. By the Custom House a steam yacht, gleaming ghostly white in the darkness, lay at rest. And so, as the boat slipped through the buoys, and the molten silver dripped from the oars, I thought of you, my friend at home,

and of my promise that I would tell you of the life of men in a cargo-tramp.

I propose, as I go on from sea to sea, to tell, in the simplest language in my power, of the life that is around me, of the men among whom I toil. I shall not tell you of these fair towns of the Southern Sea, for you have travelled in years gone by. I shall not prattle of the beauties of Nature, for the prattle is at your elbow in books. But I shall—nay, must, for it is my use and habit—tell you about myself and the things in my heart. I shall be, not a hero talking about men, but a man talking about heroes, as well as the astonishing beings who go down to the sea in ships, and have their business in great waters.

To you, therefore, these occasional writings will be in somewise addressed. You are my friend, and I know you well. That alone is to me a mystic thread in the skein of my complex life, a thread which may not be severed without peril. You, moreover, know me well, or perhaps better, inasmuch as I am but passing the periods of early manhood, while you are in the placid phases of an unencumbered middle-age. So, in speaking of the deep things of life, I may leave much to be taken for granted, as is fitting between friends.

I offer no apology, moreover, for the form of these Letters from an Ocean Tramp. Even if I unwisely

endeavoured to hide their literary character under a disguise of colloquialisms and familiar references to personal intimacies, I should fail, because, as I have just said, you know me well. In your private judgments, I believe, I am allocated among those who are destined to set the Thames on fire. In plainer words, you believe that I have an ambition. This is true, and so I make no attempt to conceal from you the ulterior design of these essays. Ere you have read one of them, you will perceive that I am writing a book.

I shall take no umbrage at the failure of my communications to call forth replies. I know you to be a bad correspondent, but a valuable friend. I know that your attitude toward a letter addressed to you is that of a mediæval prince toward a recalcitrant prisoner—viz., get all the information possible out of him, and then commit him to the flames. Possibly, when I have attained to a deeper knowledge of the spirit of the Middle Ages, I shall also have discovered the motives for this curious survival of barbarism in your character. I can only hope humbly that these papers, armed with their avowed literary import, will not share the fate of the commoner envoys passing through your hands, but will be treated as noble ambassadors rather than as hapless petitioners, not merely escaping the flames of oblivion, but receiving

safe conduct, courteous audience, and honourable lodging.

II

I SUPPOSE we may say of everyone, that he sooner or later falls a victim to the desire to travel, with as much truth as we say, far more often, that he falls a victim to love. However that may be, I claim no special destiny when I say that I have been mastered by both passions, except perhaps that they culminated in my case simultaneously.

I must go back to the time when I was some six years old to find the first faint evidences of the rover in me. At that time we lived almost at the foot of that interminable thoroughfare, the Finsbury Park Road, next door to a childless dame whose sole companion was a pug of surpassing hideousness of aspect, and whose sole recreation was a morning stroll in Finsbury Park with this pug. How I came to form a third person in these walks I cannot quite remember but I can imagine. At the age of six I was a solemn child, unclean in habits, consorting with "grown-ups," and filled with an unsocial hatred for the baby whose matutinal ablutions were consummated at the same hour at which the old lady usually took her walk. I can remember that I was supposed to assist in some way at those ablutions, probably to hold the

mottled soap, which curiously resembled the infant's limbs when pinched with cold; and so, I suppose, I would steal out and join the lady and her dog, walking a little to one side as we drifted slowly up the dull suburban street into the park. Sometimes we went as far as the lake, and I have faint memories of a bun, purchased by the dame, and munched by me as we watched the gardeners trimming the beds. I do not wish to suggest that this lady was my first love—I have never carried my senophile proclivities to that extent. She was, to me, the antithesis of mottled soap and cradle-rocking, and as such she lives in my memory. I am also grateful to her for giving me my first glimpse of a world outside the front door; an ugly world, it is true, a world of raucous bargaining and ill-bred enjoyment, but a world nevertheless.

Why should I tell of so trivial an incident? Bear with me a moment.

Since I have been at sea I have often reflected upon the fact that many phases of my life are even now going on, quite heedless of my absence, quite apathetic of my very existence, in fact. How marvellous, it seems to me, to know that life at my old school is proceeding upon exactly the same lines as when I was there! At this moment I can see, in imagination, the whole routine; and I can tell at any time

what the school is doing. Again, I know precisely the goings-in and the comings-out of all the staff at my old employer's; picture to myself with ease what is happening at any instant. More wonderful still, I know what my friend is doing at this moment. I know that he is seated in his room at the Institute, talking to our friends (perchance of me), ere they descend to their lectures at seven o'clock. At ten, while I am "turned in," he will be leaving the Institute, and the 'bus will put him down at his favourite hostelry. At this moment he is smoking a cigarette! But then, of course, he is always smoking a cigarette!

It is a far cry from a stealthy stroll with an old woman in Finsbury Park to a twenty-thousand-mile tramp in a freighter, and yet one is the logical outcome of the other, arrived at by unconscious yet inevitable steps. Listen again.

At a later period, when I had discovered that tools were a necessary complement to my intellectual well-being, I brought my insatiable desire to *make* something to the assistance of my equally insatiable desire to *go* somewhere. From a sugar-box and a pair of perambulator wheels I fashioned a cart, between the shafts of which I travelled many leagues into the wilds of Middlesex and Essex. "Leagues" must be understood in the sense in which Don Quixote would have used the word. I do not suppose I ever traversed

more than eight or ten miles at a time. But never, while the desire to go out and see is living within me, shall I forget how, one breathless August day, when the air was heavy with the aroma of creosoted sleepers, my small brother and I stared through the gates of a level crossing, and saw Epping Forest in the blue distance! O phantoms of Cortes, Balboa, and De Soto, wert thou there? O Sir Francis, hadst thou that thrill when

> *"Drake went down to the Horn,*
> *And England was crowned thereby"?*

But I grow magniloquent. My object is attained if I can but show that when my friend took me under his wing at the Institute long years agone, when the innocent-looking lad with the fair hair, that might have had an incipient tonsure superimposed without incongruity, drifted away from textbooks of mechanics, and sat down with Schiller, Ducoudray, and Carlyle, he little imagined how adventurous a spirit there boiled under that demure disguise of retiring scholarship—a spirit fired with an untamable passion for looking over the back-garden wall!

Even perambulator wheels give out, however. I forget whether the wheels of my little cart failed before my mother's patience, or the reverse. I was growing away from those tiny journeys; my head

bulged with loose heaps of intellectual rubbish acquired during long hours of unsociable communion with a box of books in the lumber room. I knew the date of Evil Merodach's accession to the Assyrian throne, but I did not know who killed Cock Robin. I knew more than Keats about the discovery of the Pacific, but I did not know Keats. I knew exactly how pig-iron was smelted, but I did not know the iron which enters into the soul. I knew how to differentiate between living and non-living matter, but I did not know that I was alive. Then a new heaven and a new hell opened before me; I was sent away to school.

Concerning school and, after school, apprenticeship, I shall not speak. Neither mind nor body can wander far in those humane penitentiaries called schools. I had fed myself with *History* since I had learned, painfully enough, to read, and here at school I found I knew nothing. What did it matter? The joy of knowing the name of the wife of Darius, of Lucan, of Cæsar, was mine alone. I wove stories about Roxana and Polla, but I doubt if any one ever wove stories about the Conventicle Act, or the Petition of Rights, or the Supremacy of the Pope, as told in a school history. I often wonder that boys do not grow up to hate their country, when they are gorged with the horrible trash in those yellow volumes.

I once read of a little boy who killed himself after reading "The Mighty Atom." I believe many people deplored this, and expressed aversion to the book in consequence. That is proper; but suppose the school history had related the story of "The Little Princes in the Tower" with the same power and intensity which Corelli employs in the "Atom," and suppose the little boy had been so overwhelmed with the horror and vividness of the historical perspective that he had hanged himself behind the fourth-form classroom door—well, then, I should say the remainder of the boys would have learned the reign of Richard the Third as it has never been learned before or since, and the unhappy suicide would not have died in vain.

But, as I said, one cannot wander far at school. A schoolmaster once advised his colleagues to take up some literary hobby—essay writing, articles for the press, etc.; for, said he, teaching is a narrowing profession. I wonder if any schoolmaster has ever imagined how narrowing it is for the boys? Have they never seen the look of abject boredom creep over the faces of even clever lads as the "lesson" drones on: "At this period the Gothic style of architecture arose, and was much used in Northern Europe for ecclesiastical buildings." And so on, including dates. Whose spirit would not fail? Why not, oh, my masters, why not use this inborn passion for wandering

abroad of which I write? Why not take that jaded band of youths out across yon fields, take them to the village church, and *show* them grinning gargoyle and curling finial, show them the deep-cut blocks of stone, show them, on your return, a picture of the Rue de la Grosse Horloge at Rouen? Would your trade be narrowing then?

III

But the sea!

My friend asked me once, of the Mediterranean—Is it really blue? And I replied that I could give him no notion of the colour of it. And that is true. From the real "sea-green" of the shallow North Sea to the turquoise-blue of the Bay; from the grey-white rush of the Irish Sea to the clear-cut emerald of the Clyde Estuary; from the colourless, oily swell of the Equatorial Atlantic to the paraffin-hued rollers of the Tropic of Cancer, the sea varies as human nature itself. To the artist, I imagine, no two square miles are alike, no two sunsets, no two sunrises:

> *"His sea in no showing the same,*
> *His sea, yet the same in all showing."*

As I climbed the steep side of the almost-empty steamer, lying at the Tyne-main Buoys, a keen, alert, bearded face looked over the gunwale above me. I

stepped aboard and spoke to the owner of this face. I said, "Is the Chief aboard?"

"He is not."

"Is the Captain aboard?"

"He is not."

"Then who *is* aboard?"

"The Mate's aboard."

"Are you the Mate?"

"I am that."

"My name is McAlnwick. I am signing on with this steamer."

"Ye're welcome." And we shook hands.

He is the very image of my old Headmaster, is this mate of the *Benvenuto*. The trim beard, the keen, blue, deep-set eyes, the smile—how often have I seen them from my vantage-point at the bottom of the Sixth Form! On his head is an old uniform cap with two gold bands and an obliterated badge. He wears a soiled mess-jacket with brass buttons in the breast-pocket of which I see the mouthpiece of a certain ivory-stemmed pipe. His hands are in his trouser pockets, and he turns from me to howl into the cavernous hold some directions to the cargo-men below. In the gathering gloom of a short January afternoon, with the rush and roar of the winches in my ears, I stumble aft to my quarters, thinking pleasantly of my first acquaintance.

And our friendship grows as we proceed. When we have slipped out of the Tyne one grey evening, when the lights of Shields and Sunderland die away, we are friends. For, as I prophesied, my whiskey would open hearts. It was on a cold, bleak morning, ere we left Newcastle, that I heard a stealthy step down the stairs to my room, and a husky whisper—had I a nip o' whiskey? Yes, I had a nip. The bottle is opened, and I fill two glasses. Evidently the First Officer is no believer in dilution. With a hushed warning of "Ould Maun!" as a dull snoring comes through the partition, he tosses my whiskey "down his neck," rubs his stomach, and vanishes like—like a spirit! Later in the day, as I stare across at some huge ships-of-war (for we are opposite Elswick now), I hear a voice, a hearty voice, at my elbow.

"Thank ye, Mister McAlnwick, for the whiskey. 'Twas good!"

I express my pleasure at hearing this. He touches me on the shoulder.

"Come down to me berth this evening," he says, "an' we'll have a *nip*." And I promise.

Perhaps it is the sensation of drinking whiskey with my Headmaster's double, but I enjoy creeping down the companion-way to the Mate's room. And I, being of the true line of descent, with my father held

in memory still, am welcome. I am taken into this old sea-dog's confidence, and we talk. I have learnt, I think, the delicate art of asking questions of the men who do the world's work. Perhaps because I have dwelt so long with them, because I love them truly, they tell me the deep things of their lives. And so you must picture me in the Mate's room, seated on his settee, while he loads my knees with photographs of his wife and children. This is Jack, son and heir, in his Boys' Brigade uniform. He has a flute, too, which he "plays beautiful, Mr. McAlnwick—beautiful!" Then there is Madge, a sweet little English maid of fourteen, with a violin: "Her mother to the life." "Dot" follows, with only her big six-year-old eyes looking out of curls which are golden. And the Baby on his mother's knee—but I cannot describe babies. To me they are not beautiful creatures. They always seem to me, in photographs, to be stonily demanding why they have been born; and I, wretched man that I am, cannot answer them, for I do not know. Calypso, too, *not* "eternally aground on the Goodwin Sands of inconsolability," interests me, in that I also was mothered of a sea-wife. A hard life, I imagine, a hard life. I find no delight in the sea in these mariners. "A Life on the Ocean Wave" was not written by one who earned his bread from port to port. My friend the

Mate (he has gone on watch now, so I may speak freely) lives for the future. He holds a master's ticket, yes; but commands do not come to all. He lives for the time when the insurance money falls in, when he will sit down in the little house in Penarth where the sun warms the creeper on the back-garden wall. He will keep chickens, and perhaps there will be a cucumber frame between the peas and the vegetable patch, and he will do a little gardening when the weather is fine, and smoke, and read the shipping news. "And there shall be no more sea."

Not that I would give you to think that a Chief Officer's life is one of toil. Indeed, on a steamship, while at sea, he has little to do. His "watch" is a sinecure save in thick weather, and is usually occupied by day with sundry odd jobs, by night with thoughts of home. In port he is busy like everybody else; but at sea, in fine weather, his greatest grievance is the short hours "off" and "on." Our steamer carries but two deck officers, and these two keep alternate "watch and watch" throughout the twenty-four hours. This means that his watch below is all sleep. The Chief Officer comes off at eight p.m., say, washes himself, smokes a pipe, and "turns in." At eleven-forty-five the sailor coming on watch at the wheel calls him, and he "turns out." Nothing can equal

the ghastly expression on the faces of men who have been torn from their sleep at an unnaturally premature hour. They move along the iron decks like ghosts, peering into one's face like disembodied spirits seeking their corporeal correlatives, and avoiding stanchions, chains, and other pitfalls in an uncanny fashion. In the meantime, the Second Officer drifts "aft" to his bunk for another four-hour sleep. And so on, day after day, for weeks.

IV

I HAVE this, at any rate, to say of sea-life: a man is pre-eminently conscious of a Soul. I feel, remembering the blithe positivism of my early note, that I am here scarcely consistent. As I stood by the rail this morning at four o'clock—the icy fingers of the wind ruffled my hair so that the roots tingled deliciously, and a low, greenish cloud-bank, which was Ireland, lay nebulously against our port bow—I felt a change take place. It was almost physical, organic. The dawn grew whiter, and the rose-pink banners of the coming sun reached out across the grey wastes of the St. George's Channel. I am loth to use the trite metaphor of "a spiritual dawn." By a strange twist of things, my barest hint of a soul within me, that is to say, the faintest glimmer of the ever-

increasing purpose of my being—the moment it showed through, the outer world, including my own self, had always greeted it with inextinguishable laughter. Perhaps because the purpose was always so very immature, so very uncertain. I wanted—I hardly knew what. My ideas of morality were so terrible that I left it alone, on one side, for a time, and charged full tilt at art. I shouted that I thought music a disease, and musicians crushed me. I did not mean that; but I could get no nearer to what I did mean in any other phrase. I told hard, practical business men that they were dreamers and visionaries; and they are still dreaming.

But the Angel of the Spirit does not move in any prescribed path, or make his visits to any time-table. I think I heard the far-off beating of his wings this morning, as we swept up-channel towards the Clyde, and I think I was promised deeper knowledge of Love and Life than heretofore. I know that with the dawn came a sense of infinite power and vision, as though the cool wind were the rushing music of the spheres, and the rosy cloudland the outer portals of the Kingdom of God.

And, indeed, I have had my reward. I had come from Italy, where I had wandered through churches and galleries, and had seen the supreme excellence of a generation whose like we shall not see again, and as

we came up that stately firth and discovered a generation as supreme in their art as the Italians of the sixteenth century were in theirs, I held my breath.

From Greenock to Glasgow resounded the clangour of hammers and the thunder of mechanism. Plate by plate, rivet by rivet, and beam by beam, there grew before my very eyes the shapes of half a hundred ships. I see more clearly still, now, what I meant by insisting on the conservation of intellectual energy. My friend points piteously to past periods, and says, "They can't do it now, old man." And I smile and point to those steel steamships, growing in grace and beauty as I watch, and I say, "They couldn't do *that* then, old man!" Just as the physical energy in this universe is a definite totality, so is the intellectual or spiritual energy. The Da Vinci of to-day leaves his Last Supper undepicted; but he drives a Tube through the London clay. Cellini no longer casts a Perseus and alternates a murder with a *Trattato;* he builds engines and railroads and ships. Michael Angelo smites no sibyls from the living stone, but he has carved the face of the very earth to his design. And though no fair youth steps forth to paint the unearthly nimbus-light around the brows of his beloved madonna, I count it fair exchange that from every reef and point of this our sea-girt isle there

shines a radiance none can watch without a catching of the breath.

V

It is a far call from such musings to the Skipper, whom I encountered as I was in the midst of them. It is only the bald truth to say that I had not then considered him to be a human being. Even now I am uncertain how to describe him, for we do not meet often. He is a tall, powerfully built, slow-moving man, strong with the strength of those who live continually at sea. Something apart from temporary bias made me look distastefully upon his personality. I resolved to fasten it upon my dissecting board, and analyse it, relegating it if possible to its order, genus, and species. Let me try.

A single glance at the specimen before us, gentlemen, tells us that we have to deal with a remarkable case of arrested development. Although inexperienced observers might imagine traces of the British colonel, as found in Pall Mall, in the bristling white moustache, swollen neck, and red gills, we find neither public school education nor inefficiency much in evidence anywhere. On the contrary, education is in a rudimentary condition, though with slightly protuberent mathematical and fictional glands. Inefficiency, too, is quite absent, the organ having had but

small opportunity to perform its functions. The subject, we may conclude, gentlemen, has been accustomed to a sort of mathematical progression and having to ascertain its whereabouts in the water by "taking the sun." It has been fed chiefly on novels, food which requires no digestive organs. It has a horror of land generally, and should never be looked for "on the rocks." You observe this accumulation of yellow tissue round the heart. The subject is particularly fond of gold, which metal eventually strangles the heart and renders its action ineffective and unreliable.

Longfellow, if I remember rightly, drew a very spirited comparison between the building and launching of a ship and the building and launching of a state. The state, said he, is a ship. M-yes, in a poetical way. But no poetry is needed to say that a ship is a state. I maintain that it is the most perfect state yet conceived; and it is almost startling to think that so perfect an institution as a ship can be run successfully without morality, without honesty, without religion, without even ceremonial—without, in fact, any of those props usually considered by Tories and Nonconformists to be so vital to the body-politic.

For, observe, here on this ship we have some forty human beings, each of whom has certain clearly defined duties to perform, each of whom owes instant and absolute obedience to his superior officer; each of

whom receives a definite amount of food, drink, tobacco, and sleep per day; each of whom is bound for a certain period to remain in the state, but is free to go or stay when that period terminates; each of whom is at liberty to be of any persuasion he please, of any political party he please, to be of any nationality he please, provided he speak the language of the state; each of whom is medically attended by the state; and, finally, each of whom can snap his fingers at every Utopia-monger since Plato, and call him a fool who makes paradises for other fools to dwell in. So, I say, the ship is a perfect state, its very perfection being attested by the desire of its inhabitants to end their days elsewhere.

Joking aside, though, I fear my notions of sailormen have been sadly jarred since I began to study them. Writing with one eye on this master-mariner of ours, I call to mind certain conceptions of the sailorman which my youthful mind gathered from books and relations. He was an honest, God-fearing man; slightly superstitious certainly, slightly forcible in his language at times, slightly garrulous when telling you about the *Sarah Sands;* but all these were as spots on the sun. He was just and upright towards all men, never dreamed of making money "on his own," and read prayers aloud on Sunday morning to the assembled seamen.

Humph! I own I cannot imagine this skipper reading anything aloud to his crew except the Riot Act, and he would not get more than half-way through that if his cartridges were dry. There is a brutal, edge-of-civilization look in his cold blue eye which harmonizes ill with the Brixton address on the letters he sends to his wife.

Ah, well! Sometimes, when I think of this man and his like, when I think of my puny attempts to creep into their skins, I must need laugh, lest, like Beaumarchais, I should weep. What, after all, do I know of him? What is there in my armoury to pierce this impenetrable outer-man? Once, when I was Browning-mad, I began an epic. Yes, I, an epic! I pictured the hordes of civilisation sweeping over an immense and beautiful mountain, crushing, destroying, manufacturing, and the burden of their cry was a scornful text of Ruskin's—"We do not come here to look at the mountain"; and they shouted, "Stand aside." And then, when the mountain lay blackened, and dead, and disembowelled, out of the hordes of slaves came a youth who would not work and thereby lose his soul; so he set out on a pilgrimage. And the burden of *his* song was "the hearts of men."

> "*And the cry went up to the roofs again,*
> *Show me the way to the hearts of men.*"

But, alas! by the time I had got back into blank verse again, he had fallen in love, and as far as I know he lived happy ever after. But I often think of his clear, boyish voice singing, "Show me the way to the hearts of men."

Gilbert Chesterton, whose genius I hope my friend will some day appreciate, once wrote a strange "crazy tale," in which he meets a madman who had stood in a field; and this seemingly silent pasture had presented to his ears an unspeakable uproar. And he says, "I could hear the daisies grow!" Well, I have sometimes thought of that when in some roaring street of London. Could I but hear men and women think as they pass along! To what a tiny hum would the traffic fall when that titanic clangour met my ears! I imagine Walter Pater had this thought in mind when he says, so finely, of young Gaston de Latour: "He became aware, suddenly, of the great stream of human tears, falling always through the shadows of the world."

How good that is! But, alas! So few read Pater. It is true men cannot possibly read everything. To quote another exquisite thinker, who I fear drops more and more into oblivion: "A man would die in the first cloisters" if he tried to read all the books of the world. But it is strange so few read those eight or nine volumes, so beautifully printed, which are

Pater's legacy to us. How they would be repaid by the delicate dexterity of his art, the wonderful music of his style! But I digress.

I have no doubt that many monarchs would envy the life of a steamship captain at sea. Indeed, his duties are non-existent, his responsibility enormous. He bears the same relation to his company that a Viceroy of India bears to the Home Government. So extended were his powers that he could take the steamer into a port, sell her cargo, sell the vessel herself, discharge her crew, and disappear for ever. It is a sad pill for us sentimentalists that those who live by and on the sea have less sentiment than any others. These masters are wholly intent on the things of which money is the exchange. They have never yet seen "the light that never was, on sea or land." Their utmost flight above "pickings" and "store commissions" is a morose evangelicalism, a sort of ill-breeding illumined by the smoky light of the Apocalypse. But they never relax their iron grasp on this world. Perhaps because they feel the supernal tugging at them so persistently they hold the tighter to the tangible. They are ashamed, I think, to let any divinity show through. "And ye shall be as gods" was not uttered of them. The *romance*—that is the word!—the *romance* of their lives is never mirrored in their souls. And the realisation of this

has sometimes led me to imagine that—it was always so! I mean that there was nothing poetic to Hercules about the Augean task, when the pungent smell of ammonia filled his nostrils, and he bent a sweat-dewed face to that mighty scavenging once more: that there was nothing poetic to Cæsar about the Rubicon: nothing poetic to Clive about India. The world seems to have an invincible prejudice against men who see the romance in the work they are doing. The footballing, cigarette-smoking clerk, who lives at Hornsey or Tufnell Park, works in an office in Queen Victoria Street, lunches at Lyons's, and plays football at Shepherd's Bush, sees no romance in his own life, which is in reality thrilling with adventure, but thinks Captain Kettle the hero of an ideal existence. Captain Kettle, bringing coal from Dunston Staiths to Genoa, suffers day after day of boredom, and reads Marie Corelli and Hall Caine with a relish only equalled by the girl typewriters in the second-class carriages of the eight-fifteen up from Croydon or Hampstead Heath. These people cannot see the sunlight of romance shining on their own faces! I observe in myself a frantic resentment when I fail to convince the other officers that they are heroes. They regard such crazy notions as dangerous and scarcely decent. You can now perceive why religion occasionally gains such a hold upon these men. To

be uplifted about work, or nature, or love, is derogatory to their dignity as bond-slaves of the industrial world; but in the realms of the infinite future, in the Kingdom of God, where "there shall be no more sea," their souls break away from the harbour-mud, and they put out on the illimitable ocean of belief.

VI

It is so long since I set my hand to paper that I am grown rusty! I did not write you from Madeira—that is true. One cannot write from Madeira when "Madeira" means a plunging vortex of coal-dust, a blazing sun, and the unending roar of the winches as they fish up ton after ton of coal. Moreover, I was boarded by a battalion of fleas from the Spanish labourers in my vicinity—fleas that had evidently been apprenticed to their trade, and had been allowed free scope for the development of their ubiquitous genius. I looked at the old rascal who tallied the bags with me, envisaged in parchment, and clothed in picturesque remnants, and heard his croaking "*Cincuo saco, Señor,*" or "*Cuarro saco, Señor,*" as he bade me note the varying numbers on the hook, and I wondered inwardly whether the Holy Office had experimented during the sixteenth century with Spanish fleas, and so brought them to such an astonishing

perfection in the administration of slow torture. Breeding, I take it, holds good with fleas as with horses, dogs etc. Those born of parents with thicker mail, longer springs, harder proboscis, and greater daring in initiative, would doubtless be selected and encouraged, if I may say so, to go farther. It is possible that many famous recantations could be accounted for by this hypothesis. Galileo, for instance, probably had a sensitive epidermis which afforded an unlimited field for the exploitation of Spanish fleas, which formed, according to my theory, an indispensable item in the torture chest carried by the fraternity in Tuscany. Giordano Bruno, on the other hand, I imagine to have been a dark-skinned heretic, tanned by travel and hardship, and regarding the aphaniperous insect with the sardonic contempt of one who had lived in England in the sixteenth century. His own gown probably contained . . .

I was roused from these musings by observing four bags come up on the hook, and hearing them saluted by my picturesque *vis-à vis* with "*Cincuo saco, Señor!*" I deserted my theory and hastened to point out the error of fact. He bowed his head in submission with all the haughty grace of Old Castile. When out at sea once more, I looked back along his ancestral line; I saw him in the days of old, marching through Italy with the Great Emperor, taking part

in some murderous deed that cried to the law for vengeance, flying from Spain in a tall galleon to still more desperate work upon the high seas, settling in these pleasant islands with bloody booty in pieces of eight, drifting down and down to an adobe hut, and an occasional job as sub-deputy assistant stevedore to a British coal factor. Then he faded from my sight, and the life of an ocean tramp closed round me once more.

VII

Sailcloth and coal-dust being our equivalent for sackcloth and ashes, the steamer looks mournful indeed as she drives southward towards the Cape. But with lower latitudes comes warmer weather, and a sea so unutterably smooth that one loses faith in the agony of the Bay or the Gulf of Lyons, while the hellish frenzy of the North Atlantic in winter is a distemper of the brain. It is in such halcyon days that we begin to believe in paint. The decks are methodically chipped and scraped of their corroding rust, ventilators are washed and painted, and all the deck-houses are cleansed of a coating of coal-dust which seems appalling. As the days drone by the filth disappears; pots of red, white, brown, and black paint come out of the Mate's secret store in the "fore-peak," and one hears satirical approval from

those below. "Like a little yacht, she is," says one, and the Second Mate is asked if he has a R. Y. S. flag in the chart-room. I fear the wit who called the engine-room a whited sepulchre had some smack of truth in him. The Mate had given it an external coating of paint as white as the driven snow, and it needed no heaven-sent seer to perceive that within it was full of all uncleanness. But what would you? The engines do not run of themselves, though to say so is one of the navigator's few joys in a world of woe. The ship herself knows better, I think, though perchance she is like us other mortals, and thinks her heart best unattended, and sees no connection between the twenty-five tons of coal she eats per day and the tiny clink which the speed recorder gives every quarter of a mile on the poop. We below, at any rate, know all this, for therein is the justification of our existence. And so *our* decorations must needs wait till we reach port, when the holds are in travail and the winches scream out their agony to the bare brown hills beyond the town and mingle with the deep, dull roar of the surf on the barrier reef.

And now let me describe my day at sea, as well as I am able. Different indeed from those I was wont to spend at home. No delicious hours in our pet hostelries; no Sundays with music and an open window looking out upon the river; no rollicking even-

ings in some dear old tumble-down studio; no midnight rambles towards home down the Fulham Road, where the ghostly women walk; no cosy talks round the fire when the fog lies white against the glass, while the candle-light glows on the tall, warm rose-wood bookcase, and all is well with us. Nay, as eight-bells strikes ting-ting-ting-ting-ting-ting-ting-ting, and the hands of the clocks point to twelve midnight, I awake. Ten minutes before, George the Fourth, of whom I may tell more anon, switches on the light and punches me in the ribs. I turn over to sleep again, while he rummages in his berth for soap, towel, and clean shirt, and goes below. A gay, likeable lad is George the Fourth, with bonnie brown hair and steady blue eyes.

Mechanically I rise at twelve, hustle on my "dungarees," and, sweat-rag in my teeth, I pass along the deck beneath the stars which dust the midnight dome. My friend the Mate is just ahead, as I vanish through a low-arched doorway which shows black against his white paint. Careful now; these stairs are steep, and the upward-rising air is like a gust of the "stormy blast of hell." Round the low-pressure cylinder, then down again—and we are "below."

The steady beat and kick has become a thunderous uproar; by the yellow light of the electrics you can see the engines—*my* engines for the next four hours.

George is round by the pumps, stripped to the waist, washing. He has finished; on the black-board he has recorded his steam-pressure, his vacuum, his speed per minute, the temperature of his sea water, his discharge water, and feed water; but he cannot leave till I have thumbed all bearings, noted all water levels, tried the gauges, and see that bilges, pumps, thrust-block, tunnel-shaft, and stern-gland are all right. And while I do all this I try to make out the orchestration of the uproar as my friend would some tremendous Wagnerian clangour. Ah, what would he think of this, the very heart of things, if he were but here?

Does George the Fourth feel the romance of it? Not a bit. George the Fourth was pitch-forked into a marine engineering shop at the ripe age of thirteen. He is twenty-two now, and carnal-minded. He wants "siller" for—well, *not* for the Broomielaw. He wants to go "east" again to Singapore, where the ladies of Japan are so charming and so cheap. The only hope for him is that he may fall in love. I pray without ceasing that he may fall in love. See the young pagan lounging round by the stokehold door. Now you will perceive what I argued as to the heroic nature of their lives.

"L.P. Top end is warm," I observe reproachfully.

"'Twas red-hot when it came to me," he exagger-

ates genially, putting a clay "gun" in his mouth, and adding:

"Chief says, clean Number Four smoke-boxes fore and aft yoore watch, an' ta trimmers to tak' nowt fra' th' thwart-ship boonkers."

Then he swings away, climbing the stairs with one eye on the engine. A goodly youth, such as we admire; a magnificent young animal with possibilities.

And then the firemen. I stand under the ventilator—it is cooler—and I watch them toil. Think well upon it, my friend. These were men doing this while you were at your German University, while you were travelling over Europe and storing your mind with the best of all times. They are doing it now, will do it while you are at your work at the Institute. They have their business in the great waters. That little man there, with two fingers of his left hand gone, is Joe, a Welshman from his beloved Abertawe. Beyond him, again, the huge gaunt frame and battered deep-sea cap, the draggled military moustache surmounted by high cheek-bones, the long, thin, sinewy arms tattooed with French dancing-girls—where shall our knowledge of the nations place him? That is Androwsky, from Novorossisk, in South Russia. A vast, silent man, uttering but three or four words a day. His story? I cannot tell it, for he never speaks. In my poor

way I have tried to get it in German, but it is no good. In the meantime he is almost the best fireman in the ship. Indeed, all my men are good. Scarcely ever do we have less than full steam at the end of the watch.

And now, my engines! To the uninitiated it is, I suppose, a tiresome, bewildering uproar. And yet every component, every note of this great harmony, has a special meaning for the engineer; moreover, the smallest dissonance is detected at once, even though he be almost ready to doze. So finely attuned to the music does the ear become that the dropping of a hammer in the stoke-hold, the rattling of a chain on deck, the rocking of a barrel in the stores, makes one jump. It is the same with the eye. It is even the same with the hand. We can tell in an instant if a bearing has warmed ever so slightly beyond its legitimate temperature. And so it is difficult to know "who is the potter and who the pot." The man and the machine are inextricably associated, and their reflex actions, one upon the other, are infinite. It is this extraordinary intimacy, this ceaseless vigilance and proximity, that gives the marine engineer such a pull over all others where endurance and resource accompany responsibility. In all big power-stations you will find many men with long sea service in charge of the engines.

I remember arguing once with a matter-of-fact apprentice in the shop concerning the suburbs as suitable localities for such as he. He was not convinced. "There!" he said, slapping the shelf above his bench. "That's where I'd like ter sleep. All yer gotter do at six o'clock is roll off and turn to!" Well, that is just what he would get at sea. In most steamers the engineer walks out of the mess-room, bathroom, or berth, into an alley-way on either side of the engine platform. The beat of the engines becomes part of his environment. He sleeps with it pulsing in his ears, so that if she slows or stops he opens his eyes. When I go up at four o'clock and call the Second Engineer, he will stretch, yawn, half open one eye, and mutter, "What's the steam?"

To keep him awake I retail some piece of current engine gossip. "After-bilge pump jibbed at three o'clock," I say. "Aw ri' now?" he asks. "Yes, aw ri' now," I answer. "You'll have to watch the M.P. guide though—she's warm." Then, remarking that the after-well is dry, and that I've got plenty of water in the boilers for him, I leave him and go below till he relieves me. It is a point of honour among us to know every kink and crotchet of day-to-day working. If a joint starts "blowing" ever so little away up in some obscure corner of our kingdom, we know of it within an hour or two. One would think

we were a mothers' meeting discussing our babies, to hear the grave tittle-tattle concerning the inevitable weakness of babies and engines which passes over the mess-room table.

Now come with me along the tunnel, then, to the end of the world. A narrow, sliding water-tight door in the bulkhead here, under the shadow of the thrust-block—elegance in design, you will observe, being strictly subordinated to use. Follow carefully now, and leave that shaft alone. It will not help you at all if you slip. The music has died away, only a solemn *clonk-clonk—clonk-clonk* reverberates through this narrow, Norman-arched catacomb. At length we emerge into a larger vaulted chamber, where the air is singularly fresh—but I forgot. I am not writing a smugglers' cave story. We are under an air-shaft running up to the poop-deck, and we may go no further. The fourteen-inch shaft disappears through a gland, and, just beyond that is the eighteen-foot propeller whirling in the blue ocean water. Here, for us, is the great First Cause. Of the illimitable worlds of marine flora and fauna outside these riveted steel walls the sailor-man knows nothing and cares less. What are called "the wonders of the deep" have no part in the life of the greatest wonder of the deep—the seaman.

And when the propeller drops away, as it does

sometimes—drops "*down to the dark, to the utter dark, where the blind white sea-snakes are*"—there goes out from that ship all life, all motion. Even as the mass of metal plunges downward and as the frenzied engineer rushes through blinding steam and water to stop the engines in their panic rush, the spirit of the vessel goes out of her in a great sigh. With dampered ash-pits her fires blacken and go out, the idle steering-engine clanks and rattles as the useless rudder tugs at her chains, and the crew tell in whispers how it happened *just* like that on the *Gipsy Queen*, out of Sunderland, or the *Gerard Dow*, out of Antwerp. All of which is not to be learned in the study at home. Let us get back to the engine-room.

I am curious to know how all this would strike my friend at home. Would it not, as Henley used to say, give him much to perpend? I hear him mutter that phrase we talked out once, at the tea-table—"The Age of Mechanism." But why not an Age of Heroism? Mind, I use this latter word in its true sense as I use the word Hero. For some occult reason, known only to Brixton and Peckham Rye, a hero is the person who jumps into the Thames and pulls a woman out, or the interesting inanity of a popular serial. There is nothing essentially heroic in life-saving. Indeed, all the old heroes of Norseland, Rome, and Greece regarded the saving of life with a

contempt that was only natural when we consider the utter lack of board schools and their frantic belief in a hereafter. I imagine the Norse Sea-kings who pushed out to Vine-land—aye, even down to Cape Cod—would have been puzzled to hear an undersized clerk who had saved a man from a watery grave described as a hero. *Their* method was to pull the drowning wretch out with a boat-hook, and curse him for being so clumsy as to fall in. Eric the Red never worried about a sailor who had the bad judgment to be washed overside during the night. Hercules would have felt outraged had the Royal Humane Society of the period loaded him down with their medals. Achilles would as soon have thought of committing the interminable catalogue of the Grecian Ships to memory as of associating the saving of life with the heroic. I am not suggesting that these heroes are more worthy of emulation than a life-saver; I only want to explain that there is, in our day, a race of beings, half-man, half-god, who correspond, in all broad characteristics, to those rather indecent heroes of early imaginative literature. They do with ease those deeds which would have appalled the mailed monsters of chivalry; they regard the other sex as being created solely for their use in port; they love life dearly, but they leave the saving of it, like the heroes of old, to the gods.

One has only to listen (in the galley) to their nonchalantly narrated tales of mystery and horror to realize the truth of that argument. A steady monotone is the key of their telling, their voices rising only to hammer home some particularly horrific detail. Sometimes, in the clangour of the engine-room, they will relate perilous misadventures at sea, or ludicrous entanglements in sunny southern ports. But they never waste breath in elaboration or "atmosphere." They leave that to the nervous listener. They know nothing of the artistic values of their virile tales. They do not know they are only carrying on the tradition of the men of all time since Homer. They fling you the fine gold of their own lives, and wallow in the tittle-tattle of lady-novelists and *Reynolds's*. They seethe with admiration for Captain Kettle's amazing manœuvres, while the shipping offices are papered with lists of those who are too indolent or too forgetful to claim their service medals from the Government.

VIII

I REMEMBER, in the grey dawn one day last week, my relief sang in my ear as he wiped his hands after "feeling round," "*Deutschland's* astern, goin' like fury." "Sure?" I asked. "Only boat with four funnels in the line," he said. Four funnels! I raced

up and aft, and saw her. Some three miles astern going westward, going grandly. From each of her enormous funnels belched vast clouds of black smoke till she looked like some Yorkshire township afloat. Through glasses I could see the dome of the immense dining saloon, and the myriad port-holes in her wall-like side. I could see her moving fast, though so far away. As the head sea caught the massive bows, she never waited. Her 35,000 h.p. drove her crashing through them, and they broke high in air in clouds of foam. Splendid! I thought. But my heart was with those "below." Think of the toil! Six or seven hundred tons of coal per day is flung into her dozens of furnaces, against our twenty-five tons. Think of the twenty-odd engineers who scarcely see their bunks from the Elbe to the Hudson. And, in that cool, grey, pearly dawn, think of those passengers sleeping in their palatial state-rooms, with never a thought of the slaves who drive that monstrous ship across the Atlantic at such an appalling speed. I say "appalling" because I know. The smoking-room nuisance will say, "Pooh! My dear fellow, the *Lusitania* licks us clean with her twenty-five knots." He is coldly critical because he does not know.

But I digress.

Look around now. You observe we lose very

little space in gangways. Even in front of the engines, where we are walking to and fro, the space is perilously narrow between the fly-wheel of the reversing engine and the lathe. Some thirty feet long, this engine-room, bulkhead to bulkhead, and, save for a recess or two extending to the ship's skin, penned in between bunkers. Twelve hundred tons of coal, distributed like a thick wall round us, make the place warm in the tropics. Forward, the stoke-holds, dimly enough lit save when a furnace door opens and a fiery glow illuminates the bent back and soot-blurred face of some cosmopolitan fireman. Overhead, each lit by a single lamp, are the water-gauges —green glass tubes in which the water ebbs and flows with the motion of the ship.

Well, the time is going fast—'twill soon be four o'clock, eight bells, and I am relieved. What do I think of on "watch"? That's a question! The engines chiefly, with an under-current of "other things." Often and often, in the dark nooks of my dominions, will I see the glimmering, phantom *light-o'-love*. Sometimes it will come and sit beside me if all runs smooth, and then I fly across the broad blue floors of the tropic night sky towards England. Not that my fairy elf is a fair-weather friend. Through blinding oil and sweat I have seen grey eyes smile and a white hand beckon. In times of trial

and sore need I have turned desperately towards that faery glimmer, and never have I come back unencouraged or unrefreshed.

Of my friend, too, I think often, as I know he thinks of me. Of our dear old rooms on the Walk; of our cosy evenings alone; of our rambles in search of the Perfect Pub (where, he told me, they sold hot rum up to 3 a. m.); of the Chelsea Freaks, who add so unconsciously to the gaiety of the nations—how I have laughed incontinently, and how some fireman's face would brighten when I laughed, though he knew not the reason!

Of books, too, I have many thoughts; which reminds me that one cannot imagine how different are the "values" of books, out here at sea, to their values at home in the metropolis. To steal a phrase from chemistry, their "valency" alters. Their relative "combining weights" seem to vary; by which I mean, their applicability to life, their vital importance to me as a man, changes. This change, moreover, is all in favour of the classics. One sees through shams more quickly—at least, I think so. Books which I could always respect, yet never touch, now come forth and show their glories to me. My own past work, too, drops pathetically into its own place. And that is? Spare me this confession!

One night, one star-light night, when the dark blue heaven, slashed across with the pale immensity of the Milky Way, watched me with its million winking eyes, I stole out on the poop with some stories in my hand, and dropped them into the creamy rush of the wake. As the poor little bits of paper swayed and eddied and drowned in the foaming vortex, I felt, deep down in that heart which some say I do not possess, a vague tremor of unrest. I felt, somehow, close to Eternity. And then, as I went below once more, I wondered, "Will they *all* go like that?" "Shall I live to do *any* good work?" Oh, the terrible sadness of Noble Attempts! How I toiled at those stories! And all for nothing. Flung, like the ashes from our furnaces, like the rubbish from our larders, into the cruel oblivion of the unheeding sea.

IX

Such is the mood which comes over me at times when the pettiness of the past starts up in the presence of these immensities of sea and sky. M., you know, when he would come back to his studio from some yachting cruise in the Channel, and find me in his armchair, would drag me out to look at the ceaselessly changing glories of the river at sunset, and tell me how the vastness of the sea always com-

municated to him an overwhelming sense of the Power of God.

"You can't get away from it, old man," he would say. "Out there alone, man is nothing, God is everything." Why could I never assent to that? Why, when people ask me if I love the sea, am I silent? Well, have you ever heard the sudden yapping of a puppy at night? Imagine it, then, at sea. The two Immensities between which we creep: the sea flashing with her own secret glory of phosphorescent fire, the sky emblazoned with her countless diadems, and then—yap-yap-yap! That is how the pestilent cackle of many people affects me when they rave about the sea. Why do they not keep silent, like the stars? God! These fools, I think, would clatter up the steps of the Great White Throne, talking, talking, talking! When the pearly gates swing wide to let us in, when we pace the burnished vistas towards the Presence, when the measureless music of the Most High God fills our hearts—*yap-yap-yap!*

Music, I said! I think I stand towards music as I stand towards sea and sky. Oh, I could squirm when I think of the bickerings I have had with music-lovers. And yet with you, my friend, prince of music-lovers, I have had no quarrel. Because, I think, you let me alone. When you feel in the mood, when the

moon is on the river, and the warm breeze gently sways the curtains by the open window, you will sit down and improvise, and I will lie in my deep chair, and smoke and dream. You cease, and say "Do you like it?" and I am silent.

Then you laugh and go on again. You understand. But what maniacal frenzy is this which demands a vociferous "passionate love of music" from everyone? Watch the current dish-water fiction. Every character, male and female, is "passionately fond of music." Which means? That the readers of this stuff consider a passionate love of music to be fashionable. It is so easy, you see, to possess it. There is no need to study either musical theory, practice, history, or biography. An inane expression of vacuous content when music is being rendered, a quantity of rhapsodical rubbish about Chopin and Beethoven without any knowledge of either, and behold! a lover of music. *Yap-yap-yap!*

With all this, I know, you agree, but you ask yourself, as you read, what has this to do with a marine engineer's working day? It has everything to do with it. It has everything to do with the working day of every man. For this indiscriminate belauding of the love of music leads to an almost unimaginable hypocrisy among those who do not think. Cer-

tainly, Music is the highest of the Arts, and the oldest, just (I presume) as Astronomy is the highest and most ancient science. One is pure form, the other pure mathematics. And so, I may conclude, the "Music of the Spheres" comprises all that is highest and purest and truest within our comprehension. But this fashionable, open-mouthed delirium is no more a worship of music than star-gazing is serious astronomy. These hypocrites are sailing under false colours. I noticed, when I once suggested at a dinner-table the cultivation of the tin whistle, amusement among the men, and titters among the women. When I asked why old Pan's instrument should be so bespattered with ridicule, they were instantly serious, as is their habit when you mention any one who has passed away. You see my point? I protest against this nasty slime of hypocrisy which is befouling every part of our intellectual and national life. We love the sea, we old sea-dogs, descendants (we proudly think) of the mighty Norsemen—we love it from Brighton Beach. We love Sport, do we who sneer at Frenchmen because they cannot play football—we love it from the closely packed amphitheatres of the race-course and footer-field, as spectators. We love War—with a penny flag and a yell in front of the Mansion House. We love Children, for we leave them to dwell in slums. And we love Music

with all our hearts, because we were told that we did, and the wise repeat that it elevates and refines the soul.

X

I AM disappointed with the meagre letter my friend sends me, "in haste"! Disappointed and surprised withal, inasmuch as he finds time to say, hastily enough, "Give me of your best; describe, *toujours*, describe!" To which I can only reply, "Humph!" *Mon ami*, I do not write for the sake of showing off my penmanship, nor my authorship. When I have time, I lie down, on my stuffed-seaweed bed, and write my thoughts leisurely and enjoyably. A letter is something which would not be set down if the two persons concerned were within speaking distance. The mere fact that I endeavour to give my jottings some rude literary finish proves nothing to the contrary. When we are gathered together round the fire or the tea-table, the same thing obtains. The difference between conversation and tittle-tattle lies in the participants of the former giving a finish to their contributions, watching for points, keeping the main channel of conversation clear of the lumber of extraneous witticism and personalities, gradually leading the timid to think and, later, to express their thoughts, using the learning which they have ac-

quired in secret for the *edification* or building-up of us all.

I remember how, when young H—— visited our anchorage, he sat silent and abashed while we thundered and declaimed about his bewildered head. And then, when the conversation moved, naturally enough, from education to religion, from religion to science, and from science to evolution, I noticed how, so to speak, he pricked up his ears. He was thinking then, trying to realize, however faintly, that inside him was something different to anything inside us. His Catholic training, his sequestered up-bringing, his entomological studies, his *intellectual resiliency*, so deftly utilized by the Society of Jesus—all these came gradually into view, and we found truth, which is perfected praise, emanating from the babe by whom, I had been assured, we were to be bored to distraction.

We realize only too little what has been lost through the decay of conversation. "*Come, let us reason together.*" And "letters" are only a form of reasoning together adapted to our special needs, gaining perhaps some added pathos from the implied separation of kindred souls, and a further value from the permanence and potential artistry of the form itself. It is not incumbent upon us to be very deep in the eighteenth century to remark that, with conversation, letter-writing dwindles and dies before

the rush of mechanism and trade. It is easy to see the reason of this. Mechanism and trade are expressions of dissatisfaction with one's circumstances. Men used machines to make and carry commodities, not because they felt the exquisite joy of making, or the still higher joy of giving, but because they, or their wives, wanted larger houses, more splendid equipages, more sumptuous provender. Conversation, on the other hand, implies leisure and contentment of mind. I do not mean idlers and persons of no ambition. Neither of these classes ever wrote letters or shone in conversations.

So, musing upon my friend's hasty screed, I wonder how I am, in very truth, to give him of my best. True, I know from that hint that he is fighting with beasts at Ephesus to get his play into working, or rather playing order. This is sufficient to make me forgive my friend. But consider in future, *mon ami*, that your letters are the only conversation I can enjoy out here, for the heroes with whom I toil know not the art.

XI

THE transition of a great nation from barbarism to an elementary form of culture is always interesting. So, too, is the same transition in the case of a "great profession." In 1840, when the propulsion of ships

by means of a steam-driven screw opened a new era in maritime history, the "practical man" in the engineering trade was an uneducated savage. Possessing no trade union, no voice in Parliament, no means of educating himself in the intricate theory of the machinery he helped to build, the mechanic of sixty years ago was regarded by those above him in the social scale merely as a "hand." When, therefore, steamships became common, and men were needed to operate and care for the propelling mechanism, they were naturally drawn from the ranks of mechanics who were employed in the works to construct it. Stokers were enlisted, in a similar way, from those working on land-boilers. Here, then, were two new classes of seamen, corresponding very largely to the officers and sailors of a sailing-ship. To the unbiassed judgment, it went without saying that the engineer on watch would take rank with the navigating officer on watch; but the old school of mariners, the school whose ideas of progress are crystallised for all time in the historic report of certain Admiralty Lords that "steam power would never be of any practical use in Her Majesty's Navy," thought differently. In their opinion, the engineer was the same as a stoker, and from that day almost to this the deck-officer who served his time in a sailing-ship secretly regards the engineers of his steamer as upstarts

more or less, whose position and pay are a gross encroachment upon his own more ancient privileges.

A little consideration will show that there was some reason for this feeling in the beginning. In the case of the Royal Navy, the aggravation was particularly acute. The deck-officers, then as now, were sons of gentlemen, were members of an ancient and honourable service, a service included among that select quaternity, to be outside of which was to be a nonentity—the Navy, the Army, the Church, and the Bar. The naval officer, then as now, did not soil his hands, wore a sword, and was swathed in an inextricable meshwork of red tape, service codes, and High Toryism. He had his own peculiar notions of studying a profession, looked askance at the new-fangled method of driving a ship, honestly thinking, with Ruskin, that a "floating kettle" was a direct contravention of the laws of God. Imagine, then, the aristocratic consternation of these honourable gentlemen when the care and maintenance of propelling machinery, auxiliary mechanism, and also guns and gun-mountings, were gradually transferred to a body of men of low social extraction, uncultured and unpolished land-lubbers and civilians! Only within the last twenty years have naval engineer officers, now drawn from the same social strata as the navigating

officers, won official recognition of their importance in the *personnel* of a ship.

In the case of the engineers of the Mercantile Marine the struggle has been the same, though by no means so bitter or so sustained. The reasons for this are two.

In the first place, the navigating officers of a merchantman are merely the employees of civilians—the shipowners. In the second place, the Board of Trade, by compelling shipowners to carry a certain number of navigators and engineers holding certificates of competency, have placed them on one professional level. Nevertheless, the animosity between the mates and the shrewd, greasy, sea-going engineer was keen enough, sharpened no doubt by the preponderating wages of the latter. Again, the former's habits of deference and mute obedience to the master, at once navigator, agent, and magistrate of the ship, were not readily assimilated by the engineer, whose democratic consciousness was just then rising into being, and whose mechanical instincts were outraged by the sailor's ignorant indifference to the knowledge and unremitting vigilance demanded by the machinery in his care.

It is in this fashion that a class of men like my Chief have developed. Born of the lower middle class, the artisan class, apprenticed to their trade at

twelve or thirteen years of age, and, on going to sea, suddenly finding themselves in possession of a definite uniform and rank with a fixed watch and routine, their natural instinct leads them to do their utmost to "live up" to their new dignity. In course of time, after a certain minimum of sea service, and an unbroken record of efficiency and good behaviour, the Board of Trade examiner affixes his stamp on the finished product, and the youth ventures on matrimony and indulges in dreams of rising in the world. His travelling has given his mind a certain shallow breadth of outlook; he will discuss Italian art with you, although his knowledge of Italy is confined to the low parts of Genoa and Naples, with perhaps a visit to the Campo Santo of the former. He has acquired the reading habit, perforce, at sea, though his authors would be considered dubious by the educated; and a smattering of some other language, generally Spanish, is, in his own opinion, good reason for holding himself above the common mechanic ashore. His salary as a chief engineer enables his wife to keep a servant and buy superior garments; he puts money by, and in the course of time solidifies his position as a genuine bourgeois. In the meantime he exhales Smiles. He believes in Rising in the World. He would blot out a perfectly inoffensive, if ignoble, ancestry, and he would also, if he could, make friends with English

Grammar. But how can I hope for his success in the latter struggle when the books he borrows from my little store are returned uncut. Possibly the colourless eyes, which survey me over the *retroussé* nose and deceptive moustache, are capable of gathering wisdom from the uncut fields of learning. And yet, and yet, have I not unintentionally surprised him in his cabin devouring "The Unwritten Commandment" or "The Lady's Realm," while my Aristophanes is on the settee? I do not blame a sea-going engineer for disliking Aristophanes. Many agricultural labourers would find him uninforming. But why borrow him and simulate a cultured interest in his plays?

My friend, I think, abhors blatant uxoriousness. So do I. And I fear the Most Wonderful Man on Earth is blatantly uxorious. I honour him for a certain sadness in his voice when he speaks of unrequited love. But his constant reference to Ibsen's *motif* in the "Wild Duck," though it fails in its primary object of convincing me that he is familiar with Ibsen's plays, does in truth tell me that some fair one gave him sleepless nights.

Of course, this amusing assumption would not stand a single hour in a cultured circle. Some periodicals of the day foster the fallacy in many an unfortunate mind that to read about a book is

really quite as good as actually to read it. Their readers are led to infer that learning is quite a spare-time affair. I once assured a victim of this delusion that in true culture there was no threepence-in-the-shilling discount; and he wrinkles his brows yet, I believe, wondering what I meant. How many years of close study, my friend, are required to enable one to stroll through a second-hand bookshop, pick up the *one* treasure from the shelves, and walk out again?

It may be, perchance, that I labour this trait in the character of one who would be great but for his disabilities. Which thought recalls to my mind a suspicion that intermittently haunts me—that, living as we do here on this ocean tramp, "thrown together," as the phrase goes, so constantly, faults in another man grow more and more apparent; social abrasions which would be smoothed down and forgotten ashore are roughened at each fresh encounter, until the man is hidden behind one flaming sin. Especially is this to be expected when mind and body are worn, the one with responsibility, the other with rough toil. Who am I that I should claim cultured intercourse from these heroes? Have I not shared their agony and bloody sweat in times of storm and stress? Have I not seen this same wearer of elevators in his engine-room, a blood-stained handkerchief across his head where he has been "smashed," the sweat running

from his blackened features, watching his engines with an agony no young mother ever knew?

What of the time when our main steam pipe burst in the Irish Sea in a fog? Read in the Chief Mate's log an entry, "*Delayed 2 hrs. 40 min., breakdown in engine-room.*" Simple, isn't it? But behind those brief words lies a small hell for the Chief Engineer. Behind them lies two hours and forty minutes' frenzied toil in the heat of the boiler-tops, where the arched bunkers keep the air stifling; two hours and forty minutes' work with tools that race and slither to the rolling of the ship, with bolts that burn and blister, with steam that knows no master when she's loose. Literature? Art? Old friend, these gods seem very impotent sometimes. They seem impotent, as when, for instance, my first gauge-glass burst. Pacing up and down in front of my engines, there is a hiss and a roar, and one of my firemen rushes into the engine-room, his right hand clasping the left shoulder convulsively. He has been cut to the bone with a piece of the flying glass. Men of thirty years' sea-time tell me they never have got used to a glass failing. And then the fight with the water and steam in the darkness, the frenzied groping for the wires to shut the cocks, the ceaseless roar of water and steam! A look at the engines, an adjustment of the feed-valves, lest the water get low while I am fitting a new

glass, and then to work. How glad one is when one sees that luminous ring, which denotes the water-level, rise "two-thirds glass" once more! And how far from the fine arts is he whose life is one long succession of incidents like these? Can they blame us if we look indulgently upon mere writers and painters? Surely, when the books are opened and the last log is read, when the overlooker calls our names and reads out the indictment "*Lacking culture*," we may stand up manfully and answer as clearly as we can, "Lord, we had our business in great waters."

XII

In such wise, I imagine, will George the Fourth reply. He is an admirable foil to the Most Wonderful Man on Earth. He regales you with no false sentiment; he is five feet ten in his socks, and he is clamorously indignant when you suggest that he will one day "get married." He considers love to be "damned foolishness," and despises "womanisers." He likes "tarts," has one in most ports of the Atlantic sea-board, and even writes to a certain Mexican enchantress, who lives in a nice little room over a nice little shop in a nice little street in the nice little town of Vera Cruz. What does he write? Frankly I don't know. What does he say, when he has dressed

himself in dazzling white raiment and goes ashore in Surabaya or Singapore, and sits down to tea with Japanese girls whose eyes are swollen with belladonna and whose touch communicates fire? How can I answer?

"George," I say, "what would your mother think?"

George is not communicative. He flicks ash from his cigarette and picks up a month-old *Reynolds's*. And that is a sufficient answer to my accusations, though he does not realize it. I, at any rate, have not the face to upbraid a lonely youth, without home or girl friends from one year's end to another, when in that same *Reynolds's* I see page after page of "cases." If these people swerve, if they break the tables of the law every week, surely George the Fourth may hold up his head. You see, in Geordie-land, in the ports of Tyne and Wear, where George the Fourth was bred, there are many engineers who have been out in steamers working up and down the China coast, who have had nice little homes in Hankow, Hong-Hong, or Shanghai, with Japanese wives all complete. Then when the charter was up, and the steamer came home, these practical men left homes and wives behind them, and all was just as before. That is George's dream. "China or Burma coast-trade. That's the job for me when I get ma tickut." It is

useless for a stern moralist like me to argue, because I feel certain that, being what he is, he would be entirely wise and right.

What an utter futility is marriage to a sea-going engineer! Here is my friend McGorren, a hard-working and Christian man. He is chief of a boat in the Burmese oil trade. His wife is dead; he has three children, who are being brought up with their cousins in North London. McGorren has been out East two years. It will be another two years before he can come home. Where is the morality of this? He has no home. His little ones grow up strangers to him; they are mothered by a stranger. He is voteless, yet subject to income tax. He can have no friendships, no society, no rational enjoyment save reading. Nothing! And what is his return? Four hundred a year and all found. I look into the frank eyes of George the Fourth and I am mute. In no philosophy, in no "Conduct of Life," in no "Lesson for the Day" which I have read can I discover any consolation or sane rule of living for such as he. Is not this a terrible gap in Ruskin, Emerson, and Co.? I take up the first and I ask George to listen. He is perfectly willing, because, he says with reverence, I am "a scholar," and I have read to him before.

". . . There *must* be work done by the arms, or none of us could live. There *must* be work done

by the brains, or the life we get would not be worth having. And the same men cannot do both. There is rough work to be done, and rough men must do it; there is gentle work to be done, and gentlemen must do it; and it is physically impossible that one class should do, or divide, the work of the other. And it is of no use to try to conceal this sorrowful fact by fine words, and to talk to the workman about the honourableness of manual labour and the dignity of humanity. Rough work, honourable or not, takes the life out of us; and the man who has been heaving clay out of a ditch all day, or driving an express train against the north wind all night, or holding a collier's helm in a gale on a lee shore, or whirling white-hot metal at a furnace mouth, is not the same man at the end of his day, or night, as one who has been sitting in a quiet room, with everything comfortable about him, reading books, or classing butterflies, or painting pictures."

George nods. He understands exactly what is meant. His father is skipper of a collier, his brother is in a steel works. Probably he and I know, better than John Ruskin, how rough work "takes the life out of us." But when I continue, and read to him what the wise man teaches concerning justice to men, and never-failing knight-errantry towards women, and love for natural beauty, even awe-struck George

becomes slightly sardonic, and his mouth comes down at the corners. Let me formulate his thoughts. He is asking how can one be just when the work's *got* to be done, and blame *must* fall on somebody's shoulders? How can one feel and act rightly towards women when one is young, yet compelled to live a life of alternate celibacy and licence? How can one love nature, even the sea, when the engine-room temperature is normally 90° F., and often 120° F., when the soul cries out against the endless rolling miles? Wise of the world, give answer! We two poor rough toilers sit at your feet and wait upon your words.

You will see, now, why I want George the Fourth to fall in love. But with whom is he to fall in love? Who courts the society of a sailor in a foreign port? Seamen's bethels? Ah, yes! The gentle English ladies in foreign ports are very sympathetic, very kind, very pleasant, at the Wednesday evening concert in the rebuilt Genoese palace or the deserted Neapolitan hotel, or the tin tabernacle amid the white sand and scrub; but they take good care to keep together at the upper end of the room, and the audience is railed off from them if possible, while the merry girls outside, who live shameful lives, and whose existence is ignored by the missionary, link their arms in George's and take him to their cosy little boxes high up behind those beautiful green blinds. . . .

"It's a hell of a life, but we've just got to mak' the best of it," says George, and he lounges off to join the talk in the Second's room.

I, too, sigh when he is gone. The best of it! Are these heroes of mine right after all?

> *"Then wherefore sully the entrusted gem*
> *Of high and noble life with thoughts so sick?*
> *Why pierce high-fronted honour to the quick*
> *For nothing but a dream?"*

XIII

It is an hour since George the Fourth left me, and I have been discussing the matter with the Mate. It is a habit of mine to discuss matters with the Mate. Here is a man with no theories of life, no culture, as we understand the term, no touch of modern life at all; a man of apostolic simplicity having gone down to the sea in ships since 1867. You can depend on the practicability of his conclusions, because he has dealt with facts—since 1867. "For," to quote Carlyle, "you are in contact with verities, to an unexampled degree, when you get upon the ocean, with intent to sail on it . . . bottomless destruction raging beneath you and on all hands of you, if you neglect, for any reason, the methods of keeping *it* down and making it float you to your aim!"

"'Tis a hard life, Mr. McAlnwick, an' we've just got to make the best of it."

"But, Mr. Honna, what is the best of it?"

"This! Give us your glass. One more, an' Nicholas is makin' a Stonewall Jackson in the panthry. He'll be in in a minute."

In a minute Nicholas arrives with a jug. Nicholas is the Steward, at sea since '69, a bronzed Greek from Salonika, a believer in dreams and sound investments at six per cent. He brings in a *Lloyd's News*, arrived by the last mail.

"Ah!" The Mate is certainly making the best of it. What are the exact components of the drink I cannot determine, but the resultant is without blemish; eggs, milk, brandy, rum—all these are in it, and the Mate's tongue loosens.

"Have you seen this about ze *Lorenzo*, mister?" asks Nicholas.

"What's that?"

Nicholas (reading): "'Ze s.s. *Lorenzo*, bound from New Yawk to Cuba with coke, met with heavy gales off Cape Hatteras, and has put back into Norfolk in a disabled condition. Two blades of her propeller are broken, and she is leaking badly amidships. She is to undergo a special survey before proceeding further.'"

The Mate's visage is wrinkled, his mouth is pursed

up as he sets down his glass and adjusts his spectacles to read, and he nods his head.

"See, now, 'tis two years, two years an' a half, since I left her. Nicholas, you were there then, were ye not?"

"Ess, mister. She was on the Western Ocean trade then, too."

"Aye! Lumber out o' St. John's to Liverpool." He lays down the paper. "Mr. McAlnwick, now wait while I tell ye. Ye talk of honesty at sea? I joined that ship in Glasgow, an' we signed on for the voy'ge, winter North Atlantic. General cargo for St. John's, Newf'unlan', with deals to bring back to Liverpool. And, though *you* may consider me superstitious, not havin' been long at sea" (Nicholas stands, legs apart, glass in hand, head nodding sagely), "not havin' been long at sea, I say, 'twas the Second and Fourth engineers who brought us black luck!"

"How, Mr. Honna?"

"This way. Nicholas, sit ye down and listen. I was Mate, as I am here. I went up from London and joined her, an' the Chief, who's here now, was thick as thieves with the old man, an' was courtin' the youngest daughter, tho' he never married her—*he* came to lay down the law to me. There was a spare stateroom for'ard of the alley-way, port side. The

door was locked, an' I wanted it open. Ses he, ' 'Tis locked.' Ses I, 'I want it open.' Ses he, 'Who are you?' Ye know his way, Mr. McAlnwick? Ses I, 'I'm the Mate o' this ship, an', by Gawd, if that door isn't opened smart, ye're a better man than I am.' And I took off me coat. 'Oh,' ses he, ' 'tis all right, mister, I'll have it opened.' Ye see, there was women aboard, an' the Second and Fourth were responsible."

"They were inside!" snickers Nicholas, looking at his cigar reminiscently.

"They was, Mr. McAlnwick. 'Twas scandalous —that Chief, too, trapesin' away out to Scotstoun Hill every evenin' to play cards an' shilly-shally, while his juniors had loose females aboard the ship. Well, we put out, made St. John's in sixteen days, and discharged in a fortn't. 'Twas there the Second an' Fourth began again, but they took me in. I came on deck one Saturday afternoon, the old man being ashore, and saw two females, with sealskin muffs and furred spats, lookin' roun' the poop an' liftin' their skirts over the ropes, for all the world like real ladies. An' I treated them as such, never thinkin' what they were, for to me a lady's a lady, an' I know how to behave to them. But the Second Mate stopped me as I was showin' 'em over all, and ses he, 'D'yer know what she is, Mr. Honna?' pointin' to the one with a heliatrope blouse under her jacket."

There is another snicker from Nicholas, and the Mate goes on:

"I would *not* believe it, Mr. McAlnwick. I've had my weaknesses, I have some now, or I would not be Mate of this ship. But I've never insulted my employers by makin' a—a bloomin' *seraglio* o' the ship, nor have I ever seen it done without bringin' black luck. Now, wait till I tell ye. The nex' mornin', being on deck at seven o'clock, I saw the Second and Fourth racin' up the dock. Their collars were loose at the back, an' their waistcoats were all out o' gear, an' they'd made hat-bands o' their ties. Mr. McAlnwick, ye may laugh, but they were a disgrace to the ship!

"Well, we put out o' St. John, deck-loaded with deals, in a fog, and we stayed in a fog for three days. We were all among the ice, too, an' that afternoon I came on deck to relieve Mr. Bruce, the Second Mate. The old man had her in an ice-lane, goin' full speed. Ses I, 'She's goin' fast, sir.' 'Oh,' ses he, 'she steers better so.' 'Ay,' ses I, 'but if she hits anything, she will—hit it.' A minute after, he come up out o' the fog, an' ses he, 'Stop her, Mr. Honna, stop her!' I'd me hand on the telegraph and me eye on the foc'sle head when she struck—bang! An' all the canvas caps on the foc'sle ventilators blew up an' went overboard. We'd hit a cake. The Second Mate ran out

of his berth in his shirt-sleeves, and went for'ard, an' I followed him. There she was, her nose crunched into a low-lyin' cake not two feet above the water-line. I kept all my spare gear in the fore-peak, an' the Second Mate went down to—to reconnoitre. ''Tis all right, mister,' ses he. ''Tis all right here.' Ses I, 'I don't think, Mr. Bruce, I don't think!' An' when I went down an' put me foot on those piles of rope an' bolts of canvas, they went down, all soft, under me. Ye understand? Oh, I knew there was somethin', rememberin' those flighty women, an' the foc'sle bonnets blowin' off. The water had rushed into the forepeak, an' had driven the air up, ye see.

"Well, we put her full astern and drew away, and then we put back into St. John, slow, dead slow, all the way. An' there the Second Engineer saw a doctor, an' the one in the heliatrope blouse saw a ghost!"

"Ess, 'e come up be'ind 'er, an'——"

"Now, hold yer horses, Nicholas, hold yer horses! Ye see, Mr. McAlnwick, when a woman has seen a man aboard of a ship, an' she's seen that ship hull down, or, what's the same thing, swallowed up in the fog, she writes him off, so to speak. 'Poor feller,' ses she, 'he's at sea,' just as we say, 'Poor feller, he's in the churchyard.' An' so, when that woman felt someone touch her on the arm in Main Street, and turned an' found it was the Second Engineer, she gave a

shriek like a lost soul, an' fainted on the sidewalk. So it happened. Now listen. Help yourself, Nicholas.

"We had a wooden bow put on, which took a week, an' we started again. Two days out it fell off, and we went back into St. John for the third time, an' had another fitted. I took the opportunity then of havin' a word with the Second, while we were makin' her fast. 'Mr. Carson,' ses I, 'air ye satisfied?' He knew what I meant, for he came from Carrickfergus, an' the Lady's Fever had him hard. 'Aye, mister,' ses he. ''Tis all right; I'll see her no more,' ses he. An' our luck turned. We had another bow fitted, an' we came across the Western Ocean, half-speed, an' made her fast in the Canada Dock.''

"Is that all, Mr. Honna?"

"No, no," says Nicholas, with another reminiscent giggle. "No, mister, the Super, 'e comes down, an' 'e——"

"Hold yer horses, now, Nicholas; hold yer horses, and let Jack Honna tell this yarn. Mr. McAlnwick, I said I'd show ye honesty as practised in the Mercantile Marine. Now listen. The Super—that's Mr. Fallon, as ye know—came down into my berth. 'Mornin', Honna'—ye know his way; but he seemed anxious an' fidgety. Of course, I knew without tellin' how she was insured. Ye see, mister, the *Lorenzo*

an' the *Julio* an' the *Niccolo* an' the *Benvenuto* here are insured against *total loss*, an' if we went on that reef to-night, Messrs. Crubred, Orr, and Glasswell 'ud drink champagne to it an' book our half-pay in tobacco and stamps. But then—ah, Mr. McAlnwick, then it was different. The *Lorenzo* was insured against accidents to the tune o' three thousand pound sterling, provided—*provided*, ye understand, that repairs came up to that figure. An' that was why Mr. Fallon looked worried."

"Why, Mr. Honna?" The Mate's voice drops to a whisper.

"Why, don't ye see, mister? But ye've not been long at sea. Because he'd totted up all the indents, an' added all he reasonably could on the bow plates an' stringers *plus* a new double bottom to the fore-hold, an' *then* he could only make it come to about twenty-four hundred pound. 'What's to be done, Honna?' ses he, rappin' it out. 'What's to be done?' ses I, as if I was astonished. 'What d'ye mean, Mr. Fallon?' Ses he, ''Tis a dead loss—a dead loss, Honna.' Ses I, 'I don't understand, sir.' And I looked him in the eye. 'She's not hurt,' ses he, snappin'. 'She's not hurt at all.' 'Oh,' ses I, 'is that all? Why not *hurt* her, then—hurt her?' An' I got up to go out. 'Oh,' ses he, 'we can't have that —we can't have that. Where's that indent?' And

we went on deck. Well, I went up to the office that afternoon he came over, an' he ses in a hurry, 'Honna, yer wife's comin' up to-night, ye said?' (The little man never forgets anythin', as perhaps ye've noticed.) 'Yes,' ses I, 'she is.' 'Then go an' meet her,' ses he. 'Go an' meet her.' 'What?' ses I. 'Leave the ship, with her goin' into dry-dock to-morrer an' no cap'en aboard?' 'Damn the ship,' ses he. 'Damn the ship! *I'll* look after the ship. Go an' see yer wife.' Mr. McAlnwick, when I got outside I laughed. An' when I got to Lime Street, and told my girl about Fallon damnin' the ship, she laughed too. It must have been eleven o'clock when I left the hotel an' went down to the docks. When I got there she was in dry-dock. The Super had issued orders that s.s. *Lorenzo* was to be dry-docked *after dark*, an' I saw that our luck was in. The Second Engineer was standin' by the ladder as I climbed over the side, an' ses he, solemn-like, 'Mr. Honna, I've been to see a doctor this night, an' I'm all right now. I'll see her no more.' 'Of course ye're all right!' ses I, chucklin', 'an' so's the *Lorenzo*. Come down an' have somethin'.' 'What are they doin'?' ses he. 'I was below this five minutes, an' I thought the bottom was comin' in.' 'Repairs,' ses I, wavin' me hand. 'Repairs. Come down.' An' we went. 'Twas half-past one when we got down on the dock side an'

peeped under. An' when we'd done laughin' we turned in.

"Well, I went down into the dock nex' mornin', an' the Surveyor was there with Mr. Fallon. He was a youngish man, an' probably he's learnt a good deal since that day, but he was just the feller for us. The Super introduced us, an' ses he, 'Mr. Honna will corroborate what I say, Mr. Blythe.' The Surveyor turned to look at the ship's bottom, and it was lucky he did, for me jaw was hangin'. Mr. McAlnwick, they'd had the hydraulic jacks under her, an' they'd pushed her to kingdom come! She was bent to the very keelson. Not a straight plate from stem to stern. 'It's marvellous, Mr. Honna!' ses the Surveyor. 'It's marvellous! How in the worrld did ye come home?' 'How?' ses I, laughin'. 'On our hands and knees, to be sure, mister.' 'Dear me!' he ses. 'Dear me!' 'Aye,' ses I. 'An' she steered to a hair, too!' And I went for'ard to look at her bows. He was a young man, an' I felt sorry for him, but our luck was in. Mr. Fallon came down into my room that afternoon, as I was puttin' on me shore clothes, an' ses he, 'Honna, did ye see yer wife?' 'I did, sir,' ses I. 'Is she all right?' ses he. 'No,' ses I; 'she's frettin'.' 'What's the matter wi' her?' he snaps, sittin' down where you are now. 'What?' ses I, an' I stopped as I was fixin' me collar. 'She thinks I

ought to have a new hat, Mister Fallon.' An' I looked him in the eye. 'Oh!' ses he in his sharp way. 'Get five new hats—get five new hats. Have the ship ready to be moved to-morrow night. She will be discharged, and redocked for—extended repairs. Good-day,' ses he, an' he went out. An' when I looked where he'd been sittin' there was a five-poun' note in an envelope, stickin' in the cushion."

"Did you see your wife again, Mr. Honna?"

"I did, Mr. McAlnwick, an' she pinched me black an' blue! An' when we were walkin' through the city that evenin' I saw the Second Engineer followin' a sealskin jacket along Paradise Street, and I felt glad he was leavin' to go up for his ticket."

"Is that all, Mr. Honna?" The Chief Officer's face is screwed up, his glasses are on the end of his nose (how like my old Headmaster he looks now!), and he scrutinizes the Steward's newspaper once more.

"All, Mr. McAlnwick? Apparently not, by this. Mr. Fallon'll be down to see her, for he's goin' across to see the *Giacopo*, I know, an', by thunder, he'll fix her! Never seen him in a fix yet. Eh, Nicholas?"

"Ah, he's a sharpun, by God!" This from the fervent Nicholas.

"Ses he, first thing when he put his fut on the deck when we brought the *Ludovico* into Shields from

Nikolaeff, ses he, 'Honna, look at them slack funnel stays; Honna, look at that spare propeller shaft, not painted; Honna, don't keep pigs on the saddle-back bunker-hatch—'tis insanitary.' Honna this, that, and the other all in one breath. And we'd had the blessed stern torn out of her, runnin' foul o' the breakwater, to say nothin' of pickin' up the telegraph cable with our anchor outside Constant!"

"Mr. Honna, tell me——"

"To-morrow, mister, to-morrow. 'Tis late, and I would turn in."

And so we end our day.

XIV

To-DAY's shipping news has it thus:—

Swansea.—Entered inwards, ss. Benvenuto. From S. Africa. P. W. D.

Which cryptic item covers much joy, much money, and an irrepressible consumption of strong drink. O ye rabid total-abstinence mongers! If I could only lure you away on a six-thousand-mile voyage, make you work twelve hours a day, turn you out on the middle watch, feed you on bully beef and tinned milk! Where would your blue ribbons be then? My faith, gentlemen, when once you had been paid

off at the bottom of Wind Street, I warrant me we should not see your backs for dust as you sprinted into the nearest hostelry!

And the joy, moreover, of receiving three months' pay in one lump sum! Ah! one is rich as he pushes past the green baize swing-door, and through the crowd of seamen and sharks who cluster like flies round that same green door. To the married sailor, however, that joy is chastened by the knowledge that his "judy" has been drawing half-pay all the time, and to say nothing of the advance note of two-pound-ten which he drew on joining, to buy clothes. But Jack Tar or Jack Trimmer knows well how to drown such worries. He possesses an infinite capacity for taking liquor, which inevitably goes, not to his head, but to his feet. Six of the *Benvenuto's* sailormen, two firemen, and the carpenter enter our private bar as we sit drinking. An indescribable uproar invades the room immediately. They are in their best clothes—decent boots, ready-made blue serge, red tie with green spots over a six-penny-halfpenny "dickey," and a cap that would make even Newmarket "stare and gasp." Nothing will pacify them short of drinks at their expense. A sailor with yellow hair and moustache curled and oiled insufferably, insists on providing me with a pint of rum. The carpenter, a radical and Fenian when

sober, sports a bowler with a decided "list." He embraces my yellow-haired benefactor, and now, to the music of "Remember Me to Mother Dear," rendered by the electric piano behind the bar, they waltz slowly and solemnly around. The landlady implores them to stop, and the carpenter bursts into tears. It really is very much like the "Hunting of the Snark." They are so unaffectedly wealthy, so ridiculously happy, so unspeakably vulgar! They batter their silver and gold upon the bar; they command inoffensive strangers to drink monstrous potations; they ply their feet in unconscious single-steps; they forget they have not touched the last glass, and order more; they put cataclysmal questions to the blushing lassie who serves them; they embrace one another repeatedly with maudlin affection, and are finally ejected by main force from the premises. All the world—below Wind Street—knows that the *Benvenuto* has been paid off.

And we? We drink soberly to England, home, and beauty, bank our surpluses, and scuttle back to the ship. Past interminable rows of huge hydraulic cranes, over lock-gates, under gigantic coal-shoots which hurl twenty tons of coal at once into the gaping holds of filthy colliers, we stumble and hurry along to where our own steamer is berthed. That is one of the hardships of our exalted position as officers.

We begin again as soon as we have been paid off; *they* depart, inebriated and uxorious to their homes. *They* enjoy what the political economists call "the rewards of abstinence"; *we* put on our boiler suits and crawl about in noisome bilges, soot-choked smoke-boxes, and salt-scarred evaporators.

Nevertheless, when five o'clock strikes and work is done for the day, we put on our "shore clothes" (the inevitable blue serge of the seamen), light our pipes, and go into the town again. Ah! How good it is to see people, people, people! To see cars, and shops, and girls again! How wondrously, how ineffably beautiful a barmaid appears to us, who have seen no white woman for nearly four months! And book-shops! Dear God! I was in the High Street for half an hour to-night, and I have already bagged a genuine "Galignani" Byron, calf binding, yellow paper, and suppressed poems, all complete, for three shillings. It will go well in our bookcase beside our Guiccioli Recollections. For myself I have a dear little "Grammont" with notes, a fine edition of Bandello's "Novelle," and a weird paper-covered copy of "Joseph Andrews," designed, presumably, to corrupt the youthful errantry of Swansea, and secreted by the vendor of Welsh devotional literature at the very bottom of the tuppenny box. In spite of Borrow's enthusiasm for Ab Gwilym, I have no crav-

ing for Welsh Theology, mostly by Jones and Williams, which is to be had by the cubic ton. No one buys it, I fear. The little lass who sold me the Fielding and the "Novelle" looked pale and hungry behind the stacks of books, and I am shamed, speaking merely as a thorough-paced buyer of second-hand books, that I paid more for the latter than she would have asked. But the blue-grey eyes, the nervous poise of the head, the pride in the sensitive nostrils, reminded me of someone. . . . A horrible life for a young girl, my friend, a horrible life.

I took my treasures along the brilliantly lighted streets. I walked on air, happy with a mysterious happiness. I looked at myself as I passed a shop mirror, and saw a face with a cold, cynical expression, the soul intrenched behind inscrutable, searching eyes. "You do not look happy," I said to myself as I passed on, and I smiled. I thought again of those gaudily dressed sailors; I thought of their inane felicity, and smiled again. "*De chacun selon que son habilleté, à chacun selon que ses besoins*," I muttered as I turned into an iridescent music-hall.

And now I reached the summit of experience. All the morning I was toiling in the engine-room as we ploughed across the Channel, past Lundy, and up to the Mumbles Head. I had played my part in that strange comedy of "paying off." I had toiled again

in the afternoon in a dry-docked steamer, making all safe after shutting down. I had scoured the shelves of a tiny shop for books. And now I sat in the fauteuils of a modern music-hall, beholding the amazing drama of "The Road to Ruin."

Verily, as Saint-Beuve says, "*Au théâtre on exagère toujours.*" Not that I would accuse the constructors of the piece of any lack of skill. Indeed, Scribe himself never displayed more consummate stage-craft or a greater sense of "situation," than they. As one gazes upon the spectacle of the impossible undergraduate's downfall, he loses all confidence in the impossibility; he believes that here indeed lies the road to ruin; he feels inexpressibly relieved when the young man thanks Heaven for his terrible dream of the future, and sits down to Conic Sections, his head between his hands. You notice this latter touch. The playwright knows his audience. He knows they think that an influx of Conic Sections strains the cerebral centres, and that study is always carried on with the head compressed between the hands. Thus the sermon reaches the hearts of those who still have occasional nightmares of the time when they conned "Parallel lines are those which, if produced ever so far both ways, will not meet." Alas! I fear our conceptions of art are in the same predicament.

Is it not strange, though, how customs vary? In

the Middle Ages one went to church to see the mystery play; now one goes to the music-hall to hear a sermon. "Pronounced by clergymen and others to be the most powerful sermon ever preached from the stage," etc. I wonder, as I scan my programme, whether the monastic playwrights of old ever published encomiums on their weird productions by prominent highwaymen. I say highwaymen because I can think of none who had a better right to criticise dramatic performances from the practical and moral standpoints. But the noise of the undergraduate as he goes crashing through his ruinous nightmare recalls me. I proceed to examine my companions in distress. All are engaged in the Road to Ruin. I think they like stage ruin—it is so thrilling. Moreover, it leaves out all that is at all middle-class. Even our wicked undergraduate never falls as low as the middle class. He starts as a university man, and ends in a slum, but he is saved from the second-class season ticket. I am still puzzling with this question of the middle class as I quit the theatre and make my way down to the docks. There is a mild, misty rain falling, and I turn into my favourite tavern in Wind Street for a glass of ale. The Middle Class! Why, I ask myself, are they so strange in their intellectual tastes? The wealthy I understand; the workmen I understand; but O this terrible

Middle Class! I sit musing, and four men come in upon my solitude. Obviously they are actors, rushing in for a "smile" between the acts. Obviously, I say, for their easy manners, *savoir faire*, and good breeding stamp them men of the world, and their evening dress does the rest.

"Ah, you read the *Clarion?*" observes one. I start guiltily. Yes, I had bought a copy, and I have unconsciously spread it on the table by my side. "Will you drink with us, sir?" adds another. He is not of the Middle Class.

"Thank you, I will," I answer, and my first interlocutor glances over the paper.

"Are you a Socialist?" he inquires. "Yes," I reply. "So am I." I rise, and we shake hands. This, my friend, was beyond all my imagining. It is, moreover, *not* middle class. I have ridden in a suburban train day after day for years, with people who lived in the same street, without exchanging a word. Here, in this tavern, convention dares not to show her head. And I am warmed as with the cheerful sun.

"Have you been in?" asks the man who hands me my beer, and he flings his head back to indicate the theatre.

"Not yet," I answer. "What have you on this week?"

"*A Sister's Sin.* You should see it. Come to-morrow."

* * * * * * *

"*A Sister's Sin!*"

I shall not go to see it. I dare not. I had intended to ask my Socialist whether he could solve the problem of the Middle Class for me, but he has done it. "*Au théâtre on exagère toujours.*" I hardly know which are the more baffling—the Middle Ages or the Middle Classes.

XV

I HAVE just been looking through an old, old notebook of mine, the sort of book compiled, I suppose, by every man who really sets out on the long road. I remember buying the thing, a stout volume with commercially marbled covers, at a stationer's shop in the Goswell Road. I wonder if the salesman dreamed that it would be used by the grimy apprentice to transcribe extracts from such writers as Kant and Lotze, Swinburne and Taine, Emerson and Schopenhauer? How strong, how dear to me, was all that pertained to Metaphysic in that long ago! Often, too, I see original speculations, naïve dog-

matism, sandwiched between the contextual excerpts.

Worthless, of course—it should be hardly necessary to say so. And yet, as I turn the leaves, I get occasional glimpses of real thought shining through the overstrained self-consciousness, illuminating my youthful priggishness of demeanour. For instance, how could I have been so prescient to have coupled Emerson and Schopenhauer together so persistently? Here, smudged and corrected to distraction, is a passionate defence of the former, occasioned by some academical trifler dubbing him a mere echo of Carlyle and Coleridge. I almost lived on Emerson in those days, to such good purpose, indeed, that I know him by heart. And, if I mistake not, he will come to his own again in the near future, when there will be no talk of Carlylean echoes.

All alone, sharing its page with no other thought, is this, to me, characteristic phrase: "*Mental Parabolism, N. B.*" It was like a shock to see it once more after all these years, and I have been trying to understand it. It was born, I think, of my frenzy for analogizing. I wanted some analogy, in physical phenomena, for everything in my mental experience. Professor Drummond was to be left infinitely in the rear. And by parabolism, it seems according to a later note, I meant that a man's intellectual career

is a curve, and that curve is a parabola, being the resultant of his mental mass into his intellectual force. The importance of this notion impresses me more now than then. It will explain how men of indubitable genius stop at certain points along the road. They can get no further, because their mental parabola is complete. All that has happened since is to them unreal and unimportant. One man I know exemplifies this to a remarkable degree. His parabola starts at the seventeenth century, rises to its maximum somewhere about the Johnsonian period, continues with scarcely abated vigour as far as Thackeray and Carlyle, declines towards Trollope and—ends. To speak of Meredith and Tolstoi, Ibsen and Maeterlinck, is to beat the air. The energy is exhausted, the mind has completed its curve; the rest is a quiet reminiscence of what has been.

It pleases me to think that there may be some grain of truth in all this, though I am not unmindful of the inevitable conclusion, that my own parabola will some day take its downward course, and I shall sit, quiescent, while the younger men around will demand stormily why I cannot see the grandeur, the profundity, of their newer gods. There lies the tragedy. Those gods, quite possibly, *will* be greater than mine—*must* be, if my belief in man be worth

anything. Yes, that is the tragedy. I shall be at rest, and the youths of the golden future will be seeing visions and dreaming dreams of which I have not even the faintest hint.

I feel this most keenly, when reading Nietzsche, that volcanic stammerer of the thing to come. I feel, "inside," as children say, that my parabola will be finished before I can win to the burning heart of the man. It frightens me (a sign of coming fatigue) to launch out on one of his torrents of thought—veritable rushing rivers of vitriol, burning up all that is decaying and fleshly, casting away the refined, exhausted, yet exultant spirit on some lonely point of the future, where he can see the illimitable ocean of race-possibilities.

"*Oh, noon of life! Delightful garden land! Fair summer Station!*"

So, writing (steadying myself against the Atlantic roll) one fresh thought in the blank left for it in the long ago, I close the book, and take up my present life once more.

"The secret of a joyful life is to live dangerously." Perhaps one may judge of a man's power by his reception of that aphorism. For me, at any rate, there is but unconditional assent. To live dangerously! How nauseous to me is the maternal anxiety

of some of my friends. They are so anxious for me. It is such a dangerous trade. And so on.

I have been scanning a newspaper left in the mess-room, and it has provoked me to further thought. I see, in retrospect, those myriads of nicely dressed, God-fearing suburbans in their upholstered local trains, each with his face turned towards his daily sheet, each with his scaly hide of prejudice clamped about his soul, each placidly settling the world's politics and religion to his own satisfaction, each taking his daily dram of news from the same still. I look into my own copy and read on one page of a society bazaar where Lady So-and-So and the Hon. Alicia So-and-So "presided over a very tasteful stall of dwarf myrtle-trees," etc.

In another column I am informed that some person or other, of whom I have never heard, has gone to Wiesbaden. The leading article is devoted to a eulogium of some football team, the special article asks, "Can we live on twopence a day?" You cannot imagine how unutterably turbid all this appears to me, out on the green Atlantic. It is Sunday, and so we rest; but yesterday afternoon I was out in one of the lifeboats, line-fishing for cod. The great green rollers came up from the south, and the boat rode the billows like a cockle-shell. How I would like to have had some of those city folk with me in

that up-ended lifeboat, their hands red with the cold sea water and scarred with the line as it ran through their fingers to the pull of a fourteen-pounder. Dwarf myrtle-trees! Wiesbaden! God! Let them come below with me, let me take them into our boilers and crush them down among those furred and salt-scarred tubes, and make them work. They used to tell me, when I said I loathed football, that I did not know I was alive. Do they, I wonder?

Yes, the newspaper came to me like a breath of foul city air. Very much in the same way I was affected by a remark made to me by my friend the Mate. "Where I live," said he, "one child won't play with another if its father gets five shillings a week more'n t'other's father" We were talking Socialism, if I remember rightly, and that was his argument against its feasibility. I did not notice the argument; I fell to thinking how odd it must be to live in such an atmosphere. How is it we never have it in Chelsea? I have never been the less welcome because my host or hostess has as many pounds a week as I have a year. My old friend of my 'prentice days—dear old Tom, the foreman, and Jack Williams, the slinger, they get no colder welcome from us because they live in Hammersmith or Whitechapel. Have we ourselves not seen in our rooms rich and poor, artist and mechanic, writer and

labourer? Nay, have we not had German clerk and Chinese aristocrat, German baron and Russian nihilist? What is it that permits us to dispense with that snobbery which seems almost a necessary of life to the people where the old Mate lives! I think it is lack of imagination in our women-folk, and the fetish of the home. For surely the utter antithesis of "home" is that same "dangerous life." These young men who economise and grow stingy in their desperate endeavour to establish a "home nest," some "Acacia Villa" in Wood Green or Croydon—what can they know of living dangerously? Their whole existence is a fleeing from danger. Safe callings, safe investments, safe drainage, safe transit, safe morality, safe in the arms of Jesus. *Is* it lack of imagination?

XVI

So WE, who foregathered yesterday afternoon in the shipping office, are lashed together for another four months. A motley group, my friend. Outside I stood, notebook in hand, trying to find a spare fireman who wanted a job. A mob of touts, sharks, and pimps crowded round me, hustling each other, and then turning away from my call, "Any firemen here?" In despair I go over to the "Federation

Office," where all seamen are registered in the books of life insurance, where they pay their premiums, and await possible engineers. I consult with the grave, elderly man in the office, and he asks for firemen in the bare, cold waiting-room. One man comes up, a pale, nervous chap, clean-shaven and quiet. I take his "Continuous Discharge" book, flick it open at the last entry—trawling! The last foreign-going voyage is dated 1902, "S. Africa." "Voyage not completed." I hand it back. "Won't do," I remark shortly, and look round for others. The man looks at the grave, elderly person, who takes the book. "Give him a chance," says the latter, in his low, official voice. "Look—S. Africa. The man's been serving his country. Give him a chance." "I would if he'd promise not to get enteric when we reach port," I say. "Never 'ad it yet, sir," says the man, and I take his book. "*Benvenuto.* Hurry up. She's signing on now." He runs across the road, and I follow.

When I reach the shipping office they are waiting for me. Behind the counter and seated beside the clerk is the Captain, writing our "advance notes." The clerk asks if all are present; we shuffle up closer, and he begins to read the articles to which we subscribe—signing our death-warrants, we call it. No one listens to him—he himself is paring his nails, or

arranging some other papers as he intones the sentences which are more familiar to him and to us than the Lord's Prayer to a clergyman. Then, when he has finished, each one comes up for catechism—carpenter, sailors, donkeyman, fireman, all in due order. Then the officers. "Donkeyman!" calls the clerk. A huge, muscular figure with a red handkerchief round his bull throat ceases arguing with a fireman, plunges forward, and seizes the pen. He is my friend of the last voyage, the mighty Norseman.

"What is your name?"

"Johann Nicanor Gustaffsen."

"Where were you born?"

"Stockholm."

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-two."

"Where do you live?"

"Ryder Street, Swansea."

"Any advance?"

"Yes."

And so on with each of us.

"Don't forget," says the clerk from the depths of a three-and-a-half-inch collar, "to be on the ship at nine o'clock to-morrow morning." And we troop out to make room for another crew, meet yet another coming to be paid off at the other

counter, wish we were they, and eventually reach the ship.

Strange scenes sometimes, in that shipping office, or, for that matter, in any shipping office. I shall not forget that forlorn little lad we had once engaged for mess-room steward at two pounds five a month, with his red little nose and the bullied look in his eyes. It was when he went up to sign, and answer the questions given above. What was his name? "*Christmas Hedge.*" All turned and stared at the snivelling urchin. Where was he born? "*In a field.*"

The walls, too, interest a man like me. There are notices in all the tongues of Europe on the walls—notices of sunken wrecks, of masters fined for submerging their loaded discs, of white lights in the China seas altered to green ones by the Celestial Government, of transport-medals awaiting their owners, of how to send money home from Salonika or Copenhagen or Yokohama or Singapore. Near the door, moreover, is a plain wooden money-box with no appeal for alms thereon—merely a printed slip pasted along the base of it: "*There is sorrow on the sea.*" And often and often I have seen grey chief officers and beardless "fourths" drop their sixpences into the box, for the sake of that sorrow on the sea.

And now it is night—our last night ashore. The Second Engineer asks me to go up town with him. The Chief has gone to see his wife home to Cardiff, and George goes on watch at eight-bells. So for the last time I don a linen collar and shore clothes, and we go up town. We meet sundry youth from the ship-yard; they are going to that iridescent music-hall into which I plunged six weeks ago when we came in. We pay our six-pences for two hours' high-speed enjoyment, "early performance"; enjoyment being sold nowadays very much like electricity—at a high voltage but small cost per unit. Scarcely my sort, I fear, but what would you? I cannot be hypercritical on this our last night ashore. And so I strive to feel as if I were sorry to go away, as if parting were indeed that sweet sorrow I have heard it called, as if I really cared a scrap for the things they care for. True, I feel the parting from my friend, and it is no sweet sorrow either. But that is at Paddington, when the train moves, and our hands are gripped tightly—a faint foretaste of that last terror, when he or I shall pass away into the shadows and the other will be left alone for ever. It is when I ponder upon that scene that I realize what our friendship has become, that I realize how paltry every other familiar or even relative appears by comparison. Let me

treasure this friendship carefully, healthfully, old friend, for, by my love of life, it is rare enough in these our modern times.

I have been wondering why this is—I think it is money, or rather business. Have you noticed how business *dehumanises* men? I count over in my mind dozens of men whom I know, men of age, experience, and wealth, who almost demand that I should envy them by the very way they walk the city streets. They are prosperous, they imagine. I, strolling idly through those same city streets, looking at the show, studying their faces, defied them, and said to myself, "You gentlemen are not human beings—you are business men." Not that I would tell them this; they would not understand, though they are guilty of occasional lucid intervals. They will admit, in a superior tone, that business cuts them off from a great deal. But it is evident they intend sticking to the irrefutable logic of the bank-balance. For them there is no friendship like ours. They could not afford it, bless you. How are they to know that you won't "do" them or borrow of them? No, no. The world, for them, is a place where they have a chance of besting you and me, of getting more money than you or I, of "prospering," as they call it, at another's expense.

If I say to one of these men, "I want no fortune;

I have what I need now by working for it," he looks at me as though I were stark mad. If I say, to poor Sandy Jackson, for instance, who has only one lung and is mad on "getting more business"—if I say to him, "You advise me to go in for business on my own account, Sandy. Very good. What does that mean? It means that I must become *dehumanised*, or fail. I must have no friends who are of no use to me. I must waste no time reading or writing or dreaming dreams. I must eat no dinners abroad which are not likely to bring in business. I must toil early and late, go on spare regimen, drink little, dress uncomfortably, live respectably—for what, Sandy? For a few hundreds or thousands of pounds. May I let up then? Oh, no, Sandy, that is the business man's mirage, that letting up. He never lets up until he is let down—into the tomb. It would be against his principles. Well, Sandy, I see you're at it and apparently killing yourself by it, but I wish to be excused. It isn't good enough. I want my friends, my books, my dreams most of all. Take your business; I'll to my dreams again.

So, while we sit in the gaudy playhouse, I dream my dreams of the great books I want to write, the orations I want to deliver, the lessons I want to teach, and I wonder how long my time of probation will be.

Strange that I should never make any allowance for the dangerous nature of my calling. This may be my last night ashore for ever. What of it? Well, it will be a nuisance to leave those books, lectures, and lessons to be written, given, and taught by somebody else; but I don't really mind. I only want to go along steadily to the end, and when that comes shake my friend by the hand and say "Farewell." It is plain, is it not, that I am no business man?

I am still dreaming when our noisy little crowd elbow their way out and pass up the street into a tavern. Here my friend the Second is known. He pats the fair barmaid on the cheeks, chucks the dark one under the chin, calls the landlady "old dear," and orders drinks *in extenso*. I am introduced to one and all, and another girl, neither dark nor fair, emerges from an inner room for my especial regard. We are invited within, and with glass in hand and girl on knee, we toast our coming voyage. One by one the girls are kissed; the landlady jocularly asks why she is left out, and a sense of justice makes me salute her chastely. You see, old man, this is the last night ashore. We bid them "good-bye," they wish us good luck, and we depart to our own place once more. The Second is silent. He has said good-bye to his girl—he hung back a moment as we

left the tavern. And there is something burning in my brain, just behind the eyeballs. I have not said good-bye to my girl. Or rather I mean—but I cannot formulate to myself just what I do mean at the time. I only feel, as I turn in, that I ought to have told my friend all that happened when I met her, a month ago, and that, after all, nothing really matters, and the sooner I get away to sea again the better.

XVII

Cleared for sea.
s.s Benvenuto, for S. Africa.

It is ten-thirty this clear, cold December day; the sun shines on the turquoise patch of open Channel which I can see from the bridge where I am testing the whistle; the tide is rising; the last cases of general cargo are being lowered into Number Two Hold, and from all along the deck rise little jets of steam, for the Mate is already trying the windlass. Once more we are "cleared for sea." In an hour's time the tug *Implacable*, mingling her frenzied little yelp with our deeper note, will pull us out into the middle of the dock, then round, and slowly through the big gates, into the locks. The hatches are already on the after combings, and sailors are spreading the tarpaulin

covers over them and battening down with the big wood wedges.

"Steam for eleven o'clock," said the Chief last night. Right! The gauges are trembling over the 150 mark now—enough to get away with. "Open everything out, Mr. McAlnwick," says the Second as he strolls round for a last look before going on deck. I carry out the order, glance at the water-level in the boilers, and then go for'ard to see how many of my firemen are missing. They should all be here by now. No, two short still. Old Androvsky rears himself up and points with the stem of his pipe at the quay. The ship has moved away, and the two men with sailors' bags and mattresses are watching us. They will get aboard in the locks.

The Skipper is in uniform on the bridge, and the Mate is, as usual, in a hurry. The mooring winch is groaning horribly as she hauls on a cable running from the stern to the quay while the tug pulls our head slowly round. Right down to the centre of the loading disc now. The Second Mate rushes to the fiddle-top, and shouts for "more steam"—the winch has stuck—and a howl from below tells him that the donkeyman is doing his best. As I go below again the sharp clang of the telegraph strikes my ear—"*Stand by.*"

The steam is warming the engine-room, and there is, in the atmosphere down here, a peculiar pungent smell, always present when getting away. It is, I suppose, the smell of steam, if steam has any smell. "Give 'er a turn, Mr. McAlnwick." The Chief looks down from the deck-door, and I answer "All right, sir." We are moving into the locks now, and as I start the little high-speed reversing engine the telegraph pointer moves round to "Slow ahead" with a sharp clang. "Ash-pit dampers off!" cries George the Fourth, and runs to close the drain-cocks. There is a sudden loud hammering as I open the throttle, and she moves away under her own steam. Then she sticks on a dead-centre, *à point du mort*, as the French *mécaniciens* say, and George rushes to open the intermediate valve, kicking open the water-service cock as he goes past it. At last she goes away, slow, solemn, and steamy, three pairs of eyes watching every link and bar for "trouble." "All right?" asks the Chief from above, and the Second, standing by the staircase, answers "All right, sir." Then "clang" goes the telegraph round to "Stop," and I close the throttle. "We're in the locks," says George, fiddling with an oil-cup which is loose on the intermediate pressure rod. "We're in the locks, and we soon shall cross the bar." And as he busies himself with one thing and another he hums the tune

which has swept over Swansea like some contagious disease of late:

"When there isn't a girl about,
You do feel lonely!
When there isn't a girl about
To call your only!
You're absolutely on the shelf,
Don't know what to do with yourself,
When there isn't a girl about!"

"Said good-bye to her, Mac?" he asks. I nod evasively. He has been home to Sunderland since we got in, and I found him asleep on the gallery floor, with his head in the ash-pit, the night of his return. He is better now, and since I know he has brought back a photograph from the north, I am in hopes of his having fallen in love. (*Clang! Slow ahead.*) It is high time, I think. His constitution won't stand everything, you know. And it seems such a pity for a fine young chap to—— (*Clang! Stop.*) George is recordingt he bridge orders on the blackboard on the bunker bulkhead, and I wonder—— (*Clang! Slow ahead.*) A pause; then—*Clang! FULL AHEAD.*

"Let her go away gradually, mister," says the Second as he goes round to have a look at the pumps. Cautiously the stop-valve is opened out, and the engines get into their sixty-two per-minute stride. The

firemen are at it now, trimmers are flogging away the wedges from the bunker doors, and the funnel damper is full open. And then, and then—how shall I describe the sensation of that first delicate rise and fall of the plates. I experience a feeling of buoyant life under my feet! It means we are out at sea, that we have crossed the bar. The Chief and Second have gone to get washed for dinner, George is on deck shutting off steam and watching the steering engine for defects, and I am left alone below with a greaser. I experience a feeling of exultation as I watch my engines settle down for their seven-day run to the Canary Islands. How can I explain how beautiful they are?

"All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all!"

Yes, that is how I feel just now as I pace round and round, alert for a leaky joint or a slackened nut. The solemn music of the plunging rods is all the sweeter for that I have not heard it for six weeks. We are out at sea!

And now George comes down again, and I go on deck to get my dinner. We are crossing Swansea Bay, among the brown-sailed trawlers and the in-

coming steamships. The sun shines brightly on us as we bear away southward towards Lundy, and I stare out silently across the broad Channel, thinking. Oh, my friend, stand by me now, in this my hour of need! How foolish! I am alone at sea, and my friend is in London, puzzling over my behaviour to him.

The cool breeze against my face arouses me. The mood of exultation in my engines, the mood of blank despair, both have passed, and I am, I hope, myself again. Once more "the kick o' the screw beneath us and the round blue seas outside." Once more the wandering fever is in my blood, and, as the winter's day fades away, I stand against the rail looking eastward at the flashing lights, calmer than I have been since that night—a month ago. I am an ocean tramp once more, and count it life indeed.

"And out at sea, behold the dock-lights die,
And meet my mate, the wind that tramps the world."

XVIII

I HAVE been looking into some of my books, now that the sea is so calm and the weather so enchantingly fair. I find a pleasurable contrast in dipping into such volumes as Boswell's "Johnson," Goldsmith's

"Beau Nash," and Lady Montague's "Letters." The life they depict is so different, the opinions they express so dissimilar from those I have myself gradually grown to affect. And what an amazing *farrago* is that same Boswell! Surely, if ever a book was written *con amore*, it is that one. Compare it with the "Life of Beau Nash." Each is the biography of a remarkable man, but what a difference! In every line Goldsmith displays a certain forced interest. I do not know, but I am almost positive he cared very little for his subject; I feel that the work is only being carried on for the sake of gain. Regarded so, it is a masterly little Life. Two hundred small pages—Nash merits no more on the roll of fame.

But the former, twelve hundred closely printed pages. No paltry little anecdote or incident, germane or not, is too contemptible for him. The identity of some obscure school, the mastership of which Johnson never held, is argued about until one is weary of the thing. The illegible note, written for his own eye alone, is construed in a dozen ways, and judgment delivered as though the fate of empires hung thereon. The smug complaisance with which he cites some prayer or comment to illustrate his idol's religious orthodoxy would have angered me once—*did* anger me once—but out here, on the broad blue

ocean, I smile at the toady, and marvel at the wondrous thing he has wrought.

Pleasant, too, to turn the leaves of my Dryden, and glance through some of those admirably composed prefaces, those egotistical self-criticisms so full of literary pugnacity, in an age when pluck in a poet needed searching for. I often say to folk who deplore Bernard Shaw's prefatory egotism that if they would read Dryden they would discover that Shaw is only up to his own masterly old game of imitating his predecessor's tactics. But Shaw is quite safe. He knows people do not read the literature of their own land nowadays.

I had a laugh last evening all to myself when I noticed that, in a hasty re-arrangement of my bookshelves, *Gorky* stood shouldering old *Chaucer!* Could disparity go further? And yet each is a master of his craft, each does his work with skill—with "trade finish," as we say. And so it seemed to me that, after all, one might leave the "Romaunt of the Rose" side by side with "Three of Them," on condition that each is read and re-read, if only for the workmanship.

Cellini, too, draws me as regularly and irresistibly as the moon makes our tides. Here is richness. The breathless impetuosity of the whole narrative, the inconceivable truculence of the man, fascinates

me, who am so different. When I looked at that "Perseus" in Florence, when I leaned over the medal-cases in South Kensington and stared hard at the work of his murderous hands, I felt awed and baffled. How could he do it—he with his dagger just withdrawn from some rival's shoulders, his fingers just unclasped from some enemy's windpipe? Then, again, the virile cheerfulness of the man! God is ever on his side, Justice is his guardian angel. And while musing upon him some few days back, I fell to wondering if I might not imitate him. I mean, why could not I take the life of some such man (and I know one at least who could sit for the portrait), and write a fictitious autobiography in that truculent, bombastic, interesting style? I have the material, and I believe I could do it. What do you think, old friend? It is already one of my plans for the future, when I am done wandering.

That last word reminds me of my Borrow. Who can describe the bewildering delight when one first plunges into "Lavengro" and the "Romany Rye"? To take them from the bookcase and carry them out to Barnet, where the Kingmaker fell, and read with the wind in your face and the Great North Road before your eyes—is that too much to ask of mine ancient Londoner? Believe me, the thing is worth doing. No man ever put so divine an optimism

into his books, so genuine a love of "nature." Says Mr. Petulengro: "There's night and day, brother, both sweet things; sun, moon, and stars, brother, all sweet things; there's likewise the wind on the heath. Life is very sweet, brother; who would wish to die?"

One of the most precious memories of my younger manhood is brought back to me as I write those words. It was a Sunday afternoon in late autumn, in one of those unfrequented ways which slant off from the Great North Road beyond Hadley Heath, where the green turf bordered the brown road and the leaves covered the earth beneath the trees with a carpet of flaming cloth-of-gold. I had left my book and bicycle to one side, and, seated upon a low grey stone wall, I watched the sun go down. Behind me, across the intervening meadows, rose clouds of dust, redolent of waste gases, where thundered an ever-increasing traffic of swift vehicles. In front a vaporous mist was rising from the land; the shadows broadened, and the red western glow grew deeper, while in the middle distance a tiny child, clad in green cloak and little red hood, stood conning her Sunday story—a jewel of quiet colour in the gathering autumn twilight. And so, as I listened to the roar from the macadamed highway and looked out upon that evening glory, it was as though I heard, far off, the throbbing pulse of the

great world's mighty hand, while I sat still in the heart of it.

"Life is very sweet, brother: who would wish to die?"

XIX

Is ALL this too bookish for an ocean tramp? Alas! I fear I grow too cocksure of my literary attainments out here, with none to check me. It is in London where a man finds his true level in the book world, as Johnson shrewdly observed. In the evening, when we are gathered over the fire, and opinions fly across and rebound, when one hears bookmen talk of books, and painters talk of art—that is the time when I feel myself so unutterably insignificant. Often I have looked across at T——, or G——, or ——, someone I know even better than them, and I feel discouraged. You men have *done* things, while I—well, I talk about doing things, and try, feebly enough, to make my talking good; but to what end? T—— has his work in many a public building and sacred edifice; G—— has his books on our tables and in the circulating libraries; and you have done things, too, in dramatic literature.

Meanwhile I am an engine-driver on the high seas! I know my work is in the end as honourable and more useful than yours, but I cannot always keep back a

jealous feeling when I think of the years sliding by, and nothing done. Nothing ever finished, not even —but there! That chapter of my life is finished and done with, incomplete as the story will be always. Often and often, under the stars at midnight, I think that if she would stand by me, I could be nearer success—I could take hold of life and wrench away the difficulties of it. And then again comes a more valiant, manly mood. I say to myself, I will do something yet. I will reach the heights, and show her that one man at least can stand on his own feet. I will show her that she need have no need to be ashamed of him, though no carpet-knight, only an engine-driver. And I recall that brave song in the "Gay Pretenders":

> *"I am not what she'd have me be,*
> *I am no courtier fair to see;*
> *And yet no other in the land,*
> *I swear, shall take my lady's hand!"*

Well, that is my high resolve sometimes, and I will try to keep it in front of me always, and so do something at last.

Well, well, this is sad talk for the day before Christmas! Come away from books and trouble, out on deck, where there is a breeze. The mighty Norseman is ready to cut my hair, and is waiting abaft the engine-room under the awning.

It is the donkeyman's business, aboard this ship, to cut the officers' hair. A marvellous man, a good donkeyman. And this one of ours is multi-marvellous, for he can do anything. He speaks Swedish, Danish, Russian, German, and excellent English. He has been a blacksmith, butcher, fireman, greaser, tinsmith, copper-smelter, and now, *endlich*, *enfin*, at last, a donkeyman. His frame is gigantic, his strength prodigious. On his chest is a horrific picture of the Crucifixion in red, blue, and green tattoo. Between the Christ and the starboard thief is a great triangular scar of smooth, shiny skin. One of his colossal knees is livid with scars. He tells me the story like this, keeping time with the click of the scissors.

"When I was a kid I was a wild devil. Why, I ran away with a circus that came to Stockholm, and my father he came after me and he nearly kill me. Then, one day, I had on—what you call 'em, mister?—long shoes, eight, ten feet long—ah! yes, we call 'em *ski*. Well, I go to jump thirty, forty feet, and I am only twelve years old. The strap come off my foot and I have not time to shift my balance to the other foot, and I go over and over, like a stone. I come down on my knee, and there are beer-bottles on the rocks. The English and Germans, they drink beer on the rocks—beautiful

Swedish beer, better than Löwenbrau, hein! Well, they take out of my knee fifty pieces of glass—you see the marks? And my chest it is smashed bad. They cut off three rib and look inside; this is where they look into my chest. All right! They put ribs back and box all up. Oh, I was a wild devil when I was a kid!"

Such is Johann Nicanor Gustaffsen, with his huge strength, frescoed chest, and pasty face with the jolly blue eyes. I think the women like him, and, by the hammer of Thor! he can bend a bar of iron across his knee!

XX

It is Christmas Day, and I begin it with the clock as usual. George the Fourth punches me in the ribs, grunts, "Merry new Christmas, Mac," and vanishes. There is not a breath of air stirring. Through the sultry night air the stars burn brightly. A cluster of blurred lights on the horizon show me where a liner is creeping past us in the darkness—a ship passing in the night. Clad only in dungaree trousers and singlet, I go below, on watch. The windsail hangs limp and breathless, and the thermometer stands at 120° Fah. Christmas Day!

Slowly in the hot air the hours drag on. One,

two, three o'clock. Then, "one bell." No breeze yet. I finish up, score my log on the blackboard—Sea water 90°, discharge 116°—and call the Second. He is awake, panting in the hot oven of his berth. If I wish him a merry Christmas he will murder me. I slink below again, and have a sea bath. Even salt water at 90° Fah. is a boon after four hours in that inferno.

A mug of cocoa—strange how hot cocoa cools one—and I turn in. I hear the Skipper padding up and down in his sandals on the poop, clad only in pyjamas. At last, as the stars are paling, I fall asleep.

At seven o'clock I am aroused by the mess-room steward leaning over me, closing my ports. They are flooding the decks with sea-water to cool them, and if my ports are open I am also flooded.

Still no relief. There is a deathly quiet in the mess-room as we assembled to our Christmas breakfast of bacon and eggs, coffee, cocoa, and marmalade. Imagine such a *menu* in the tropics! The butter is liquid, and from each of us, clad in singlets and white ducks, the sweat streams. The day begins unpropitiously. John Thomas, the mess-room steward, balancing himself on the top step of our companion-way with three cups of boiling cocoa in his hands, slips and thunders to the bottom. There is a chaotic mixture of scalded boy, broken cups, and

steam on the floor, and we giggle nervously in our Turkish bath.

George the Fourth goes on watch, and we lie listlessly under our awning, praying for a breeze. On the face of the blazing vault there is not a single cloud, on the face of the waters not a ripple. The sea is a vast pond of paraffin. The hot gases from the funnel rise vertically, and the sun quivers behind them. The flaps of the windsail hang dead, the sides of the canvas tube have fallen in like the neck of a skinny old man. Slowly the sun mounts over our heads and the air grows hotter and hotter. From the galley come sounds of quacking, and a few feathers roll slowly past us. Now and then an agonized trimmer will stagger out of a bunker hatch into the open air, his half-naked body black with coal-dust and gleaming with sweat. The Mate, in a big straw hat, paces the bridge slowly. The cook emerges from the galley and hastens aft for provisions—they are preparing our Christmas dinner. Roast duck, green peas, new potatoes, plum pudding—and the temperature is 105° Fah. on deck.

One bell. I rise, and go below to change for my watch—12 to 4.

"Will you take any dinner, sir?" John Thomas rubs the sweat from his forehead and sets the soup on the table. I ponder on the madness of eating

Christmas fare in that oven-like mess-room, but sentiment wins, and I sit down with the others.

"Hoondred an' twenty oonder t' win's'le," whispers George to me huskily.

"What's the sea-water?" asks the Chief.

"Eighty-nine, sir."

We push the soup aside, and John Thomas brings in the roast ducks. How appetizing they would be at home! The Chief wrenches them apart in perspiring silence, and we fall to. We peck at the food; the sweat drops from our faces into the plates, the utensils slide from our hands, and so we make the best of it. But when the pudding arrives our courage fails us. We *cannot* face plum pudding, sentiment or no sentiment. We gulp down some lime-juice and stagger away like dying men—I to four hours' purgatory below.

Slowly (oh, so slowly!) the time drags on. The greaser draws his tattooed arm across his eyes and whispers, with the triumph of a lost soul bragging of the Circle of Fire, that he has known it "'otter'n this in the Red Sea, sir." He is an entertaining man. Often I hear tales from the wide world of waters from his lips. This is his last voyage, he tells me. He is going "shore donkeyman" in future—what you call longshoreman. His wife has a nice little business in Neath now, and "she wants 'im 'ome." Have I

noticed how that high-press guide is leaking? Should he tighten up the tap-bolts in the bottom plate? I dissent, because one cannot reach them safely while she is running. It is only a trifle; better let it go. He acquiesces doubtfully, and resumes greasing. And the hours drift by.

At four o'clock the Second relieves me, looking reproachfully at the slackened windsail. Still no breeze. And the greaser, who does not go off till six o'clock, observes, "Oh, wot a—'appy Christmas!" Which would be profane if the temperature were lower.

I change into white ducks again and saunter up to the bridge to talk to my friend the Mate. If I were to paraphrase Johnson's burst of energy, I should say, "Sir, I *love* the Mate!"

"Merry Christmas, Mr. McAlnwick!" he shouts cheerfully from the upper bridge, and a chorus of yelping dogs joyfully take up the cry. They are the "Old Man's," but they follow the Mate up and down until they drop with fatigue. Black silky spaniel, rough-red Irish terrier, black and grey badger-toed Scotch half-breed, nameless mongrel—they all love the Mate. "Come here," he says, and I climb up to his level.

"The Old Man had a letter this mornin'," he says.

"Eh?" I remark blankly.

"Ah! His wife gave it me before we sailed an' I left it on his table this mornin'! Says he, at breakfast, 'Pshaw!' says he, 'it's a waste o' paper.'"

"Mr. Honna," I say, "perhaps he'll be sorry for saying that, eh?"

"He will, he will—some day, Mr. Mac," and he walks up and down the bridge for a bit, smoking the pipe his children gave him for a present last Christmas. I ask him:

"When shall we strike the trade wind, Mr. Honna?"

"Soon, soon. 'T ought to be here in the morning."

I climb down again, and sniff eagerly for the first beginnings of a breeze. Nothing, unless you are optimistic and like to stare at a brown streak away southward, between sky and sea.

I reach the engineers' awning aft of the engine-room, and see the Chief in his chair, the Fourth in his hammock, and the Second just come up for tea. I open my mouth and speak, when the regular throb of the engines is broken by a scream. Like a flash each one springs to his feet and looks at the others. The regular throb goes on as before, and George laughs, but the Second disappears through the door, I following. I shall not easily forget that scream.

Half-way down, a fireman, his face blanching under the coal-dust and sweat, meets us.

"What's up?" snaps the Second.

"Donkeyman, sir. In the crankpit!" He plunges downward again, and we do the same. Down into the fierce oily heat illuminated by the electrics in front of each engine. The second puts two fingers in his mouth and whistles shrilly to those above. And then we fall to work. The telegraph is flung over to "Stop," the throttle is closed, ashpit damper put on, and the regular throb slackens, hesitates, stops. With a dexterous flick of the reversing engine the Second catches the high-press engine on the stop centre and locks her there. And then we look.

Far better for him, poor lad, if he had taken my tip and left those tap-bolts to leak. The Second says "Hand-lamp," and I give him one. People are coming down the stairs in numbers now, and the Chief rushes up to us, looks down, and turns away sickened. The ponderous cranks have blood dashed across them, the rod is streaked and lathered with it. From the bottom of the pit comes no sound, no movement. Lying on the plates is the spanner which must have spun from his hand as he fell to destruction.

"Now then, how many more?" snarls the Second. Sweat streams from his face as he pushes the intrud-

ers away and lifts a man-hole plate in the platform. I seize the hand-lamp and get down on to the tank, and the Second follows. It is not pleasant, understand, down there, where bilge collects and rats run riot, and grease is rolled into filthy black balls, and the stench is intolerable. I push on towards the pit.

* * * * * *

A full moon, blood-red and enormous, hangs just above the eastern sky-line. In the west still burns the glow of the vanishing sun, and the pale sky is twinkling with innumerable stars. The regular throb of the engines drives the ship forward again, a sailor is hauling down the red ensign from the poop, and another moves to and fro, silhouetted against the southern sky, on the foc'sle-head. Just ahead of the bridge two more sailors sit busily sewing. The Old Man stands by the chart-house door talking to the Mate. The dogs lie quietly on the lower deck, their heads between their paws.

In the after-hatch, covered by the flag, lies that which is about to be committed to the deep.

The red glow fades from the west, and the moon swings upward, flooding the sea with silver light. Away southward lies a black streak on the sky-line and the windsail flickers a little. The two sailors have finished sewing, and go aft. A fireman breaks

the deck silence as he hoists two firebars up from the for'ard stokehold and carries them aft. Up on the poop, under the awning, the Second Mate has removed the hand-rails on the starboard quarter, and the carpenter is lashing some hatches in an inclined position.

We by the engine-room door are silent, for there is nothing to say. We wait for the *Stand by* bell in silence. A heavy footfall, and the Skipper, his bronzed face hard-drawn, his snowy hair uncovered, passes us. I think, even now, he is sorry for that sneer at his wife's little trick. He is going to get the Prayer Book that lies close to his revolver in his chest.

George and I go below and make all ready. I think the Second is glad of our company, in the terrible heat. We potter about in silence: then "*Stand by—Half—Slow—Stop.*" A few minutes' swift toil, a hurried wash, and we climb up on deck again into the moonlight. A white, silent world of waters is about us as we join the crew going aft to the poop. The awning has been partly folded back, and we see the Skipper resting his book on the tiller-gear, while the Steward stands by with a lantern. I look curiously into the faces I know so well, seeking, in the presence of death, a little more knowledge of life. I look at the Skipper, with his white hair and fierce moustache gleaming in the silver radiance of the

moon, his hands fumbling with the leaves of the book. I look at the Chief, fidgeting about in the rear, meeting no one's eye, his mouth working nervously. I look at George the Fourth; he is staring like a schoolboy at the flag-covered thing on the hatch, with the firebars lashed to its sides. And then the silence is broken by the harsh, unsteady voice:

"*I am the resurrection and the life.*"

The tension is almost unbearable now. We have not been educated to this. We are like soldiers suddenly flung into the face of the enemy.

"*We therefore commit his body to the deep, to be turned into corruption, looking for the resurrection of the body (when the sea shall give up her dead), and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who at his coming shall change our vile body that it may be like his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.*"

A pause, and he closes the book. Two of the men quietly slacken the ropes which hold the body in position, another pulls off the flag, and the dark mass on the planks plunges downward into the oily sea. Another pause, while I picture it rushing "down to the dark, to the utter dark, where the blind white sea-snakes are," and the Chief motions furtively with his fingers.

In a few minutes we are under way.

* * * * *

It is eight bells, midnight, once more. The sky to the southward is a jet-black mass of clouds, and the windsail is yawing in a strong, cool breeze. Away to the westward the moon still throws her glory over the face of the waters and I go below, thinking of the night coming, when no man shall work.

And so ends our Christmas Day.

XXI

It is Sunday, and I lie under the awning by the engine-room door, lazily reading "Faust." There is a speck on the sky-line—the mail boat, bringing a letter from my friend. I look round at the translucent opal of the bay, the glittering white of the surf on the reef, the downward swoop on an albatross, and I listen to the dull roar of the breakers, to the solemn tang-tang of the bell-buoy on the bar, and the complaisant "*ah-ha-a-a*" of some argumentative penguin. Even the drab-coloured African hills in the distance, and the corrugated Catholic church (shipped in sections) with the sun blazing on its windows, are beautiful to me to-day, for I am not of those who think religion is ugly because it is corrugated, or that

hills are repulsive because they are not in the guide-book. I am at peace, and so are the rest. My friend the Mate is fishing, but that, of course, is trite; the Mate is always fishing. I fancy the cod nudge each other and wink when they see his old face looking down into those opalescent depths, and watch him feeling at his lines for a bite. How they must have joked together this morning when he gave a shout and called for help, for he could not lift the line! We all responded to the call, and the line came up slowly. "Must be a whopper," muttered the Mate, and refused my callous suggestion that it was a coal-bag which had got entangled in the hook. At last, after an eternity of hauling, came up part of an iron bedstead, dropped from some steamer in the long ago. But the true fisherman has reserves of philosophy to cope with such slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

Meanwhile the speck has enlarged itself into a blot with a tag above it and some cotton-woolly smoke. "'Tis the *Nautilas*," observes the Mate, and he calls it "Naughty Lass" with hibernian unconsciousness of his own humour. I wonder, now, why it is that we sailor men invariably display such frantic *feminine* interest when another craft heaves in sight. The most contemptible fishing boat in the Bay of Biscay, when she appears on the horizon, receives the notice

of all hands—the old as well as the young. And when we pass a sister ship, the *Aretino* or the *Cosimo* or the *Angelo*, in mid-ocean, we talk about her and criticise her, and rake out her past history, for days. I sometimes think, from hints the Mate drops, that our own *Benvenuto* has a past, a St. John's Wood past I mean, not a Haymarket past. But he will have no talk by others against the ship. "What's the matter with the ship?" he will shout. "Damn it all, I like the ship! She's a good old ship, an' I glory in her!" So we talk scandal about the others instead.

Here, on the ragged edge of the Empire, things are managed expeditiously by the authorities. Scarcely an hour after the *Nautilas* has dropped her pick the tugboat comes out again and flings us our mail. Bosun and donkeyman trudge aft and take the letters for the foc'sle, the mess-room steward deposits a letter in my lap, and I think of my friend. At this moment he is engaged in repartee with the housekeeper as she lays the table for tea. The heavy twilight is settling down over the river outside; lovers are pacing the walk as they return from their Sunday tramp. Possibly, too, that fantastic scene which he has described to me is now enacting. He is at the piano; the housekeeper, in tears, is on her knees beside him, and they raise their melodious voices "*for those in peril on the sea.*" How affecting,

for one to be so remembered! I thank them both with all my heart.

And now he tells me that his play goes well, and I am glad. It will indeed be a red-letter day when I pay my shilling and climb into the gallery to see his work. No, I shall not criticise. Probably I shall hardly listen. I shall be thinking many thoughts, dreaming dreams, feeling simply very glad and very proud.

I sympathise always with his struggles with his *personnel*, but I think, though, he hardly allows enough for the point of view. These actors and actresses are not literary. (They *should* be, I know.) They look at an author's work as a man looks at the universe—a small part at a time. That trite old paradox that, to the actor, the part is greater than the whole, should never be forgotten. Remember, too, how "touchy," as he calls it, they *must* be, in the nature of things. Their touchiness, their affectation, their lack of culture—all are inherent in them. *Their* success is always immediate, using the word in its literal sense as a metaphysician would use it; the author's success is mediate, through time and trial. So one should not be discouraged because they fail to appreciate one's efforts to give them the atmosphere of the period. They will get the atmosphere intuitively, or not at all.

He complains of "loss of time," "thankless task," "inefficiency," and the like. Now, I think that is grumbling without cause. Take my own case, for example. I have no problems of dramatic art to wrestle with, only the problem of coal consumption. But it is ultimately the same thing, *i.e.*, energy. My friend mourns the shameful loss of energy incident to the production of a decent presentment of his dramatic conception. I, as an engineer, mourn over the hideous loss of coal incidental to the propulsion of the ship. The loss in his case, I suppose, is incalculable: in mine it is nearly seventy per cent. Think of it for a moment. The *Lusitania's* furnaces consume one thousand tons of coal per day, seven hundred of which are, in all probability, lost in the inefficiency of the steam-engine as a prime mover. It runs through the whole of our life, my friend! Waste, waste, waste! What we call the perfect cycle, the conversion of energy into heat and heat into energy, cannot, in practice, be accomplished without loss. What may interest you still more is that we cannot, even in theory, calculate on no loss whatever in the progress of the cycle, and by this same "entropy loss," as we call it, some of our more reckless physicists foresee the running down of the great universe-machine some day, and so eliminating both plays and steam-engines from the problem altogether.

But this is my point. Prodigious loss is the law of nature which she imposes both on artist and artisan. Indeed, artist and artisan have their reason of being in that loss, as I think you will admit.

Again, history will corroborate my contention as to the catholicity of this loss. Imagine the French Revolution, the Lutheran Reformation, the "Catholic" Reaction, and the like, to be *revolutions* of the vast human engine. Consider then the loss of power. Consider the impulse, the enormous impulse, applied to the piston, and then look at the result. What losses in leakages, in cooled enthusiasms, in friction-heat, in (pardon the ludicrous analogy) waste gases! Think, too, of the loss involved in unbalanced minds, as in unbalanced engines, one mass of bigoted inertia retarding another mass! Oh, my friend, my friend, you talk of "losses" as though you playwrights had a monopoly of it. Ask men of all trades, of all faiths, and they will give you, in their answers, increased knowledge of human life.

Such, at least, is my method—digging into the hearts of men. Take, for instance, my friend the Second Officer. A tall, lean young man, with an iron jaw under his brown beard. I began to talk to him one evening because he said he never had letters from home. He had a sister, he told me, but

there was no joy in the telling. "We don't hit it off," he observed grimly, and I smiled. He has no sweetheart, loves nothing but dogs. How he loves dogs! He has two at his heels all day long. He loves them almost as much as dogs love the Chief Officer, which is to distraction. He will take the solemn English terrier up on his knee and give me a lecture thereon. This same pup, I learn, is "low"—look at his nose! He is in bad health—just feel his back teeth! Saucy? Yes, certainly, but not a thoroughbred hair on him. He has worms, too, I understand, somewhere inside, and on several occasions during the voyage his bowels needed attention. I, in my utter ignorance of dog-lore, begin to marvel that the animal holds together at all under the stress of these deficiencies. Perhaps the dirt which he collects by rolling about on deck affords a protective covering. Once a week, however, his lord and master divests him of even this shadowy defence, and he emerges from a bucket, clean, soapy, and coughing violently. In all probability he rejoices in consumption as well.

The Second Officer, I say, teaches me philosophy. He has had a hard life, I think. By sheer industry he has risen from common sailor to his present berth. I say "sheer" because it seems to me that when a man has no friends or relations who care to write

to him, the way of life must be very steep indeed. I was surprised, though, to learn of his loneliness. Had he, then, no kindly light to lead him on? Unconsciously he answered me. Would I come down below and have something to drink? With pleasure; and so we went. The last time I had been in that room was when his predecessor, the little man with four children and a house of his own, had extended hospitality to me. It is not a pleasant room. A spare bunk full of canvas bolts, cordage, and other stores, make it untidy; and the Steward's stores are just behind the after bulkhead, so that it smells like a ship-chandler's warehouse. Well, we sit down, and the whiskey passes. We light cigars (magnificent Campania Generals at three farthings each), and then he ferrets about in his locker. I look at the pictures. Almanack issued by a rope-maker in Manchester; photo of an Irish terrier, legs wide part, tail at an angle of forty-five to the rest of him; photo of Scotch terrier, short legs, fat body, ears like a donkey's; photo of the officers of s.s. *Timbuctoo*, in full uniform, my friend among them, taken on the upper deck, bulldog in the foreground. By this time the Second Officer has exhumed an oblong wooden case containing a worn violin. Ah! I have his secret. He holds it like a baby, and plucks at the strings. Then he plays.

Well, he knows, by instinct I imagine, that I care nothing for music, as music. So when I ask for hymn-tunes, he smiles soberly and complies. I hear my favourites to my heart's content—"Hark, Hark, My Soul," "Weary of Earth," "Abide With Me," and "Thou Knowest, Lord." How glad they must be who believe these words! The red sun was flooding the room with his last flaming signal as the man played:

> *"Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;*
> *The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide,*
> *When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,*
> *Help of the helpless, O abide with me!"*

Yes, *mon ami*, all men know of that tremendous loss inherent in all their labours. And it is, I think, to balance that loss that they have invented religion.

XXII

It has suddenly struck me that there are many important things to be found by considering the cheap literature which floods the English and American publics week by week and month by month. I am afraid that, when at home in Chelsea, where even the idlers read Swinburne and Lord de Tabley, I had grown accustomed to the stilted point of view,

calling novelettes "trashy" and beneath an intellectual man's consideration. Well, since this particular trash forms the staple brain food in the Mercantile Marine, I must needs look into it more closely. With results.

There is a question of bulk and output. This is appalling to a laborious writer, a student or a thinker. Week by week there pours forth an unending deluge of love fiction, and week by week this deluge is absorbed into the systems of millions of human beings. We speak glibly of the world-wide fame of some classic, when, in point of fact, the people familiar with that classic are isolated specks in the vast, solid mass to whom some novelettist is a household god. The classic will have, say, one votary in the family, the novelettist will capture the family *en bloc*. An engineer will receive a cargo of novelettes, all of which have been digested, or even feverishly devoured, by his mother, wife, or sisters. He will pass them on to the Steward, who will read them and give them to the sailors and firemen. And this obtains in every ship wherever the English language is spoken. What classic can claim a public that does not seem microscopic compared to this?

I cannot but observe, too, that Miss Anonyme often writes exceedingly well. No extraneous vapourings are admitted, and the plot is steadily de-

veloped to its inevitable conclusion of "happy ever after." The metaphors are somewhat stereotyped, and quotations from Tennyson are awkwardly handled, but—what would you for a penny? Johnson's explanation—that they write well in order to be paid well—is correct. Miss Anonyme knows her "market," and she writes for it as well as can be expected under the circumstances.

A point worth noting is that this talk about "pernicious literature" is not sincere. Literature cannot be pernicious in itself. At the present time people can get exactly what they desire, because the question of price does not arise. The finest works are to be had at every free library, and for a few pence at every book-shop, and the public carefully avoids them. Novels containing chapter after chapter of neurotic aphrodisiacs and pornography masquerading as literature are priced at "a shilling net," and are avidly purchased and read by the simple, God-fearing, sea-faring man.

There is, of course, a tragic side to this question. I mean that, after all, a sublime simplicity of mind is a necessary predicate to the acceptance of this "cheap" fiction. "*A penn'orth o' loove*," George the Fourth calls a novelette, and there's something very grim to me in that phrase also.

I have already noted the "passionate love of

music" in the heroes and heroines of these stories. I made notes, and, in ten consecutive tales, one or more of the characters "was a passionate lover of music." I do not complain against the genius whose heroine elopes with a clean-shaven villain to Brittany and is married in a Gothic church with frescoed chapels. Neither do I any longer cry out when I read that "the light that never was lay over the land." I am grown callous with a course of light fiction such as I have never taken before. And I hope I shall not be misunderstood and numbered with the prigs when I say that never did literature seem to me more lovely and alluring than when I had finished my task and had opened my "Faust" once more, feeling the magic of the master beckoning "to far-off shores with smiles from other skies."

What we clearly comprehend we can clearly express. That, I think, is Boileau, though I cannot remember where I read it. The baffling thing about this fiction is that it expresses nothing, and therefore is not really a part of literature. The features of my colleagues when absorbing a first-rate soporific of this nature remind me of the symptoms of catalepsy enumerated in a treatise of forensic medicine which I once read. The influence is even physical. It is generally associated with a recumbent position, repeated yawning, and excessive languor. Loss of

memory, too, is only one of the consequences of reading a dozen novelettes in a week's run.

There is another possibility. I must not forget that in one point I found myself in error. In the case especially of engineers, this intellectual drug-taking has no effect upon their interest in professional literature. When George the Fourth goes up for his "tickut" he will be as keen about the theory of steam and the latest researches in salinometry as any of the aristocratic young gentlemen who haunt the precincts of Great George Street and Storeys Gate. This leads me to imagine that in the future there will be a vast mass of highly trained mechanicians to whom literature will be non-existent, but whose acquaintance with written technics will be enormous. Like our scientific men, perhaps. I am uneasy at the prospect, because this conception of uncultured omniscience, the calm eyes of him shining with the pride of Government-stamped knowledge, is inseparable from an utter lack of reverence for women. Neither Antony nor Pericles, but Alcibiades is his classical prototype. And so the fiction with which he will pass the time between labour and sleep will have none of the subtlety of Meredith, none of the delicate artistry of Flaubert, but rather the fluent obviousness of Guy Boothby, stripped as bare as possible of sex romance.

I am anxious to convince myself of all this, because I want so much to divorce this tremendous flood of machine-made writing from genuine literary activity. That, too, will evolve and evolve and evolve again; but with such a theme I am not genius enough to cope.

XXIII

I AM grown tired of books. It is a fact that protracted manual toil strikes a shrewd blow at one's capacity for thought, and at times I turn from the fierce intellectual life with a weariness I never knew in the old days. How my friend would smile at such a confession. I, who have thumped the supper-table until three in the morning, until our eyelids were leaden with fatigue, growing weary of the strife! Yet it is sometimes true.

After all, though, my real study nowadays is on deck and below, where Shakespeare and the musical glasses are beyond the sky-line, and one can talk to men who have never in their lives speculated upon life, have never imagined that life could possibly be arraigned and called in question, or that morality could ever be anything but "givin' the girl her lines, like a man." My friend the Mate is a compendium of humanism, the Chief provides me with curious researches in natural history. Even the Cook, with

whom I have been conversing, presents new phases of life to me, and brings me into touch with the poor, the ignorant, and the prolific. The poor whom *we* know at home are only poor in purse. These men are poor in everything save courage and the power to propagate their kind. The Cook has received a letter from his sister-in-law to the effect that he is now the father of twins, and he looks at me and smiles grimly. Under the pretence of obtaining hot water for shaving, I am admitted to his *sanctum sanctorum* abaft the funnel, and we talk. It is hardly necessary to say that the Malthusian doctrine receives cordial approbation from my friend the Cook, when I have expounded it to him.

"Certainly, Mr. McAlnwick," he observes, "but 'ow are you goin' to start?"

"You see," I reply, "it isn't a question of starting, but a question of stopping."

"Well," he says stolidly, rolling a cigarette, "'ow are you goin' to start stoppin'?"

"You," I answer, "might have dispensed with these twins."

"Lord love yer, mister, I *can* dispense with 'em easy enough. That's not the question. The question is, 'ow am I to feed 'em, now I've got 'em? An' 'ow am I to avoid 'em, me bein' a man, mind, an' not a lump o' dry wood?"

Like all theorists, I am hard put for an answer. I look round me, and watch my interlocutor preparing to make bread. There is a mammoth pan on the bench beside me containing a coast-line of flour with a lake of water in the middle. Cook is opening the yeast-jar, an expression of serious intent on his face. Some cooks sing when they make bread; the Scotchman I told you of in a previous letter invariably trilled "Stop yer ticklin', Jock," and his bread was invariably below par. But this cook does not warble. He only releases the stopper with a crack like a gun-shot, flings the liquid "doughshifter" over the lake in a devastating shower, and commences to knead, swearing softly. Anon the exorcism changes to a noise like that affected by ostlers as they tend their charges, and the lake has become a parchment-coloured morass. For five pounds a month this man toils from four a.m. to eight p. m., and his wife can find nothing better to do than present him with twins!

I look into the glowing fire and think.

I feel this is delicate ground, even allowing for the natural warmth of a man who has twins, so I am silent.

"Sometimes," Cook continues, growing pensive as the dough grows stiff, "sometimes I feel as though I could jump over the side with a ' 'ere goes nothink'

and a bit of fire-bar in me 'ip-pocket. Same blasted work, day after day. Monday curry an' rice, fresh meat an' two veg., ''arriet lane' and spuds. Toosday, salt meat ditto. Wednesday, bully soup an' pastry. Thursday, similar. Friday, kill a pig an' clean the galley. Sat'day, ''arriet lane' an' spuds, fresh meat, two veg., an' tart. Sunday, similar with eggs an' bacon aft. What good do it do? Who's the better for it all? Not me. "'Ere goes nothink!'"

He stabs the fire savagely through a rivet-hole in the door, and pushes his cauldrons about. To one who knows Cook all this is merely the safety-valve lifting. The ceaseless grind tells on the hardest soul, and you behold the result. In an hour or so he will be smiling again, and telling me how nearly he married a laundryman's daughter in Tooley Street, a favourite topic which he tries to invest with pathos. It appears that, after bidding the fair *blanchisseuse* good-night, he chanced one evening to take a walk up and down Liverpool Street, where he fell into conversation with a girl of prepossessing appearance. Quite oblivious of the fact that Mademoiselle Soap-Suds had followed him, "just to see if he was as simple as he looked," he enjoyed himself immensely for some twenty minutes, and then ran right into her. He assures me he was " 'orror-struck."

Like a man, he admitted that he was conversing with "that—that there." I always like this part of the tale. His confession seems to him to have been the uttermost depths of mortal self-abnegation. Alas, the heiress of Soap-Suds Senior had no appreciation of the queenly attribute of forgiveness. She boxed his ears, and he never saw her again. "She was allus a spiteful cat," he observes pensively; "so p'raps the wash 'us 'ud ha' been dear at the price. Still, it *was* a nice little business, an' no kid."

As I raise my pot of shaving-water a huge head and shoulders fill up the upper half of the galley doorway. The mighty Norseman has come for some "crawfish legs." Like Mr. Peggotty and the crustacea he desires to consume, he has gone into hot water very black, and emerges very red. His flannel shirt only partially drapes his illuminated chest—I see the livid scar plainly. He beams upon me, and asks for a match.

"Well, Donkey," says Cook, "'ow goes it?" "Donkey" is the mighty Norseman's professional title aboard ship.

"Aw reet, mon," says he with the fiendish aptitude of his race for idiom. "How is the Kuck?"

"Oh, splendid. Stand out o' the way, and let me make thy daily bread."

"Daily!" screams the Donkeyman. "Tell that

to the marines. I have one loaf sof' bread three times a week, an' there are seven days to a week. Daily! Tell that——"

"Find another ship, me man, find another ship if the *Benvenuto* don't suit!" And the Mate passes on to the chart-house, where are many dogs.

"Ay, will I, when we get to Swansea," says the Donkeyman to me, beaming. "There are more ships than parish churches, eh? Mister, I want to speak to you. Come out here." I go outside in the moonlight, and the mighty Norseman takes hold of the second button of my patrol-jacket.

"Well, Donkey?"

"I 'ave had a letter from Marianna," he whispers.

"Ah! And so she is——"

"She is Marianna, always Marianna now. A good letter—two and a half page. See, in German, mister. She write it very well, Marianna." And I behold a letter in German script.

Tastes differ. I am compelled to believe that passion can flow even through German script—aye, when it is written by a Swedish maiden of uncertain caligraphy. Heavenly powers! I turn the sheet to the light from the galley. Surely no mortal can decipher such a farrago of alphabetical obscurity. And I *do* so want to know what Marianna says for herself. I love Marianna, for the mighty Norseman

says she is small and dainty, and her eyes are grey, and—and—well, the resemblance doesn't end there; so when I tell my friend, he may laugh as much as he pleases. But there had been a quarrel (in German script), and the mighty Norseman had grown mightily misogynistic. His jolly pasty face had been as long as my arm most of the way out, and his sentiments, confided to me each day at seven bells, were discourteous to the sex. But now, behold the cloud lifted: German script has undone its own villainy, and Johann Nicanor Gustaffsen beams.

"I will go 'ome this time, mister," he says, folding up the reconciling hieroglyphics.

"How, Donkey—work it?"

"Not much, you bet. I go to London and take a Swedish boat from Royal Albert Docks to Gothenburg, train from Gothenburg to Marianna. Seventeen knots quadruple twin screw. I will be a passenger for one quid."

"Donkey, did you ever hear of Ibsen—Henrik Ibsen?"

"Ibsen? Noa. What ship is he Chief of, mister?"

"A ship that passes in the night, Donkey."

"What's that, mister?"

How small a thing is literary fame, after all! When one considers the density of the human atmosphere, the darkness in which the millions live,

is not Ibsen to them a ship passing in the night indeed, a mysterious light afar off, voyaging they know not where? Perhaps that is what I meant.

"He wrote plays, Donkey—*Schauspielschreiber*, you know."

"*Oa! Ich hatte nicht daran gedacht!* 'Ave you a bit of paper and envelope, mister, please? I will write to Marianna."

"Give her my love, Donkey."

"Oh-a-yes, please! I'll watch it! What? You cut me out?" A rumbling laugh comes up from that mighty chest, he beams upon me, and plunges into the galley for his crawfish legs.

XXIV

Mug of hot water in hand, I pick my way aft among the derrick chains, and descend to my room. Have I yet described it? Nine feet six by seven wide by seven high. At the for'ard end a bunk overtopped by two ports looking out upon the main deck. At the after end a settee over which is my bookcase. A chest of drawers, a shelf, a mirror, a framed photograph, a bottle-rack, and a shaving-strop adorn the starboard bulkhead. A door, placed midway in the opposite side, is hung with many clothes. A curtain screens my slumbers, and a ventilator in the

ceiling chills my toes when turned to the wind. Ceiling and walls are painted dead white, with red wainscotting round the settee. Two engravings grace the only vacant spots on my walls—one a wild piece of wood and moorland, the road shining white after a late-autumn rain, with a gypsy van showing sharp against the lowering sky; the other a wintry lane with a waggon labouring in the snow. A patrol-jacket and a uniform cap hang over a pillow-case half full of dirty clothes. Such is my home at sea.

Look round while I shave. Quite possibly some may wonder that I should affect such commonplace pictures. They cost me threepence each, in Swansea. Well, I am not concerned with their merit as pieces of decorative art. When I look at that wet road and rainy sky, I go back in thought to the days when I lived near Barnet, and the world was mine on Sunday. I recall how I was wont to throw off my morning lethargy, get astride my bicycle, a pipe in one pocket and a book in the other, and plunge into the open country beyond Hadley Heath. It had rained, very likely, in the morning, and the roads were clean and fresh, and the trees were sweet after their bath. And as the afternoon closed in I would sit on a gate in some unfrequented lane and watch the red fog darken over London town. I was happy then, as few lads are, I think. Those long silences, those

solitary communings, were *mind-building* all the time. So, when I came away from home and settled in Chelsea, and heard men talk, I felt that I, too, had something to say.

In like manner my snowscape takes me back to the time when I was a mechanic, engine-building near Aylesbury. We lived half a mile from the works, at an old inn, and we began at six o'clock. In winter time, I remember, we would snuggle into the big back kitchen, with its huge cauldron of pig-meat swinging over the open fire, and its barrels containing evil things like stoats and ferrets, to put on our boots; and when we opened the door, two feet of snow would fall in upon the floor. How well I remember that silent trudge up the bleak Birmingham Road to the works! There were always two broad ruts in the white roadway—the mail-coach had passed silently, at two o'clock. Cold, cold, cold! A white silence, save for our dark figures shuffling softly through the snow. And then a long eleven-hour day.

XXV

I HAVE occasionally mentioned my friend the Second. A keen, dark-skinned, clean-shaven face, with small blue eyes and regular white teeth. There are no flies on him. His is one of those minds which can

grasp every detail of a profession and yet remain very ignorant indeed, a mind which travel has made broader—and shallower. He is a clever, courteous, skilful, well-bred, narrow-minded Broad-Churchman. He is a total abstainer, a non-smoker, and a frequenter of houses of fair reception. If anomaly can go further, I can declare to you that he is engaged to a clergyman's daughter. When he is angered, his face grows as thin as a razor, the small blue eyes diminish to glittering points, and the small white teeth close like a vise. It is then that I am sorry for the clergyman's daughter. We do not understand each other, I fear, because I am so unsentimental. He believes in unpractical things like Money, Success, Empire, Home Life, Football, and Wales for ever. How can a man who puts faith in such visionary matters understand one who builds on the eternal and immovable bedrock of literature and art? He has sober dreams of following in his father's steps and making a fortune for himself, and he considers me weak in the head when I explain that I have made *my* wealth and am now enjoying it. Would he *ever* understand, I wonder?

"Yes, there are some from whom our Lady flies,
Whose dull, dead souls, rise not at her command,
And who, in blindness, press back from their eyes
'The light that never was on sea or land.'"

In fact, I should say he is one of those same mechanicians of whom I spoke, in whose lives literature will have no place, and the desire for a private harem supplant the *grande passion.* This may sound absurd when one remembers their love of home; but I speak with knowledge. It is easy enough to make a man out to be a patriot, or a humanitarian, or a home-lover, if you pick and choose from his complicated mentality just what suits that particular label. To know a man as he is, you must be shipmates with him, quarrel with him, mess with him week after week until you are sick of the sight of him. Then, if you are sufficiently sensitive to personality, you will divine his spiritual bedrock beneath all the superimposed recencies, and you will know whether he be "a mere phosphatous prop of flesh" or whether he have in him some genuine metallic rock, from which the fabric of the distant world-state may be fashioned.

XXVI

Once more I am writing "homeward bound." Homeward bound! Outside the Channel fog is coming down to enfold us, the wind is cold, my stock of fruit, laid in at Las Palmas is done, and George the Fourth is growling through the ventilator, "T' Longships, mister!"

Longships—that's twelve hours' run from the Mumble Head, the great white lenticular lenses of which fling wide-sweeping spokes of light across the tumbling waters of the Channel. The Skipper is cautious, has been twenty-two hours on bridge and in chart-room; refuses to go ahead until he can locate Lundy. We heard, in Grand Canary, that the big White Star *Satanic* is lying near the Lizard, back broken, total loss, heroic passengers all safely landed. Wonderful people, passengers. If they keep hysteria at a distance for a few hours, they are bravoed from one end of the Empire to the other. The *Satanic's* engineers? The Empire has overlooked them, I suppose, which is their own peculiar glory.

Homeward bound! "Finishing," too, for three of us. Chief, Second, and Fourth are leaving when we get in, and I shall be alone for a few days. That means work, I fear, and no joyful run up to Paddington this time. Well, well, next time *I* finish, and we shall foregather in the Walk once more. I was thinking, only a day or two back, that Chelsea Embankment must be in its glory now, glory of early spring. That noble line of granite coping and twinkling lights. How often have we walked down past the Barracks from Knightsbridge, taken pot-luck at the coffee-stall at the corner, and then

fared homeward between the river and the trees! Ah, me! To do it once again—that is what I long for.

In the meanwhile, the Longships are away astern, the Skipper has found Lundy, a grey hump on the port bow in the morning light, and we are "full ahead" for the Mumbles. Sailors' bags are drying on the cylinder-tops, Chief, Second, and Fourth are fixing up a "blow-out" up town to-morrow night; mess-room steward is polishing the brasswork till it shines like gold; and I am writing to my very good friend. We are all very cheerful, too; no "sailors' gloom" in our faces as we go on watch. George the Fourth (I cannot imagine what the ship will be like without him) is making himself ridiculous by doing everything for "t' last time." "T' last time!" he mutters as he starts the evaporator and adjusts the vapour-cock. He is taking the temperatures for the last time. He is going up to South Shields for his "tickut," by which he means a first-class certificate of competency issued by the Board of Trade. That is George the Fourth's utmost ambition. He is a man then; he is licensed to take any steamer of any tonnage into any sea on the chart. He has, moreover, a certain prestige, has this skylarky youth, when he gets his "chief's tickut." Ladies who preside over saloon bars will try to lure him into

matrimony. He will grow (I hope) a little steadier, and fall really and truly in love.

My colleague the Second, he intends to work ashore and sleep at home. The clergyman's daughter, I imagine, will come more and more into the scheme of things, and the mother he loves so well will give him her blessing. So each, you see, has a clearly defined plan, while I drift along, planless, ambitionless, smoking many pipes. I have been trying to think out something practicable. Am I to drift always about the world, a mere piece of flotsam on Swansea tide? Or am I to sit down once more in Chelsea, hand and brain running to seed, while the world spins on outside? I must think out a plan. And I must school myself to cancel all plans beginning "If she will—if only." Why cannot I rise to some decent sense of self-respect, to say, as says the man in "The Last Ride Together":

> *"Take back the hope you gave,—I claim*
> *Only a memory of the same."*

That's manly—pre-eminently English, in fact. But, meanwhile, I drift planless.

The mighty Norseman, too, in his own sinewy Hyperborean style, is full of joy. His jolly pasty face beams joyously upon me. He will be "a passenger for one quid" from London to Gothenburg,

thence to Stockholm, and Marianna. The engine-room is bulging, in places, with the contraband goods he is bringing home for Marianna. Pieces of silk "for the Signorina," as the handsome old huxter-lady at Canary purrs in our ears; bottles of Florida water, mule canaries, and Herrick's own divine Canary Sack, to which he so often bade "farewell." All these for the dainty maiden who indulges in German Script. God speed you, oh, mighty Norseman! May your frescoed bosom never prove unfaithful to your grey-eyed maiden. I, at least, have been the better for having known you—a ship passing in the night.

And so we come to the Mumble Head.

XXVII

Paid off, free for the afternoon, with overcoat buttoned up and collar about my ears, I stroll aimlessly through the town. It has often been my ambition to emulate those correct creatures who, when they come to a place, study maps, read guide-books, and "do" the sights one by one. But, so far, I am a dead failure. Even my own dear London is known to me by long-continued pedestrianism. When I reach a town I put up by chance, I see things by chance, leave on an impulse, and carry away precious

glimpses of nothing in particular that I can piece together at leisure into a sort of mnemonic mosaic. Well, so I stroll through Swansea, trying to forget the only two facts which I know concerning it—that Beau Nash was born here and Savage died here. They are like bits of grit in the oyster of my content. I will turn aside and see life.

I enter one of my favourite taverns. I am surrounded by maidens, bar-maidens, and a fat landlady. Amy, Baby, Starlight, Chubby—all are here, clamorous for the baubles I had promised them four months before. My friend would be shocked at their familiarity; I admit, from a certain point of view, it *is* scandalous. But, then, all things are still forgiven to sailors. And so, business being slack, I am dragged into the bar-parlour and commanded to disgorge. I produce bottles of perfume, little buckhorns, ostrich feathers, flamingo wings, and bits of silk. The big pocket of my overcoat is discharged of its cargo. I am suffocated with salutes of the boisterous, tom-boy kind, and am commanded to name my poison.

As a reward, Chubby promises to go with me to that iridescent music-hall up the street. Chubby's appearance is deceptive. She is diminutive, with a Kenwigs tail of plaited hair down her straight little back. But she is almost twenty; she is amazingly

swift behind the bar, and no man has yet bilked her of a penny. There is a Spartan courage about the small maiden, too, which I cannot but admire. Her parents are dead; her sisters both died the same week a year ago; she must earn her living; but—"No use mopin', is it?" she inquires as she fingers a locket containing photographs which hangs around her neck. That is her philosophy, couched in language that resembles herself. I should be only too delighted to take her. But—there is my incorrigible habit of reading a book or lapsing into intellectual oblivion while at the play. How many comedies have I "seen" without hearing a single word! So, when I go to the iridescent music-hall, something in the programme, or the audience, will set me musing, and Chubby will be neglected. I think I shall buy two tickets, and let Chubby take someone else—George the Fourth, say!

And Baby, fingering the silk I have brought her—Baby personifies for me that terrible problem which women and men treat so callously. Baby has already passed several milestones on the road to Alsatia and we shall meet her some day, somewhere between Hyde Park Corner and Wardour Street.

But that is far away yet. The glamour of the thing, its risk, its pleasantness, are over her as yet. Officers of the Mercantile Marine are not squeamish

in a home port, nor are they scarce. Baby's rings are worth good money. The sordid bickerings of the trade are in the future, the callous calculations, the indispensable whiskey.

Now, while Baby is bending the violet eyes of her upon a piece of Moorish silk, let me clear my mind of humbug. I am no sentimentalist in this matter. I am not certain, yet, that "my lady" of to-day is the sole repository of every virtue; neither am I dogmatic about "necessary vice," the "irreducible minimum," and such-like large viewpoints. I have, indeed, nursed a theory that our floating population might be induced to receive a certain percentage of these adjuncts to civilisation, one or two on each ship, say, with results satisfactory to all concerned. Everyone knows that, in towns, the demand is grotesquely disproportionate to the supply. The Board of Trade could deal with the question of certificates of competency.

As I sit in this bar-parlour, it seems to me that an inextinguishable howl of horror is rising from the people of England. And as I desire to be honest, I admit that I am overawed by that same tumult—a sort of singing in my ears—and so leave the problem to Mr. H. G. Wells, or someone else who deals habitually in social seismics.

After all, descriptions of seaport barmaids can

scarcely be interesting to my friend. If she lose no time in providing him with hot rum and water (not ungenerous with the sugar), she can rival either Pompadour or La Pelletier—he cares not which. Which is the callous regard of the whole business to which I have referred.

Once more adrift, I wend my way dockwards, pause at the Seamen's Mission, hesitate, and am lost. I enter a workhouse-like room, and a colourless man nods good-afternoon. Conveniences for "writing home," newspapers, magazines, flamboyant almanacks of the *Christian Herald* type, Pears' Soap art, and "*Vessels entered inwards.*" For the asking I may have back numbers of the *Christian Herald.* Mrs. Henry Wood's story-books are obtainable by the cubic foot. As the colourless man opens his mouth to address me, I shudder and back out. Give me vice, give me boredom, give me anything in the world but this "practical religion" and smug futility of ignoble minds.

I fear my philosophy has broken away and I am misanthropic. Possibly because I shall not see my friend this home-coming. Moreover, I am due on the ship even now, for the others are going off to their triumphal "finish" up town. Faring back, then, I come to the dock-head at sunset, and it is my hour. Darkness is rushing down upon the shipping as I

watch. In the distance hill piled on hill, blue dome upon blue dome, spangled with myriad firefly lights, backed by the smoky red of winter sunset; and here the shipping, ghostly now in the darkness, exquisitely beautiful in the silence. From out at sea comes a faint "*ah-oo-oo-oo*"—one more toiler coming in to rest. And it is night.

XXVIII

My friend the Chief Officer is putting fresh clothes on his bed. Clean sheets and blankets and a snowy counterpane ("All sorts o' people come in to have a chat, Mr. McAlnwick") are arranged with due care. He is brisk to-night, is my good friend, having no log to modify this time, and nothing else on hand for a day or two. Photos dusted, ports opened, tobacco and whiskey duly placed between us, he climbs into his nest and proceeds to converse. A sort of "*Tabagie*" or tobacco parliament, such as was once in force at Potsdam.

"Sure," he snorts, "'twas blackmail the baggage was after, ye can take it from *me*, and—keep the door open when she's sorting the things."

Being a young man, I wait, seated sedately on the settee, to hear more concerning "the baggage," who is, let me explain, an itinerant *blanchisseuse des*

équipages of equivocal repute. The Mate reaches for his pipe.

"Would ye believe it, Mr. McAlnwick? She comes in here, while I'm lying in me bunk, closes the door, and comes up to me. Says she, 'Oh, Mr. Mate, I'm very unhappy!' and puts her arms round me neck, in spite—in spite of all I could do, and falls to screamin'!"

"'Slack back,' says I, 'or ye'll be the most unhappy woman in this town.' An' then Nicholas he puts his head in."

"The Steward!" I ejaculate.

"The same. Ye see, mister, the baggage, she thought the Old Man was aboard, and—she was goin' to make out a case! Says Nicholas, 'Oh, my words! I'll fetch police!' An' away he cuts."

"How embarrassing!"

The blue eyes of my friend the Mate are twinkling, his face is screwed up, and his nose is wrinkled all the way up. He is more like my old Headmaster than ever.

"'Twas so, Mr. McAlnwick—'twas so. Ye see, my besettin' sin is sympathy. I feel sorry for the baggage. She has a har-rd time of it, and the ends don't meet—won't meet, nohow. But, as I said, 'Consider the situation, Mrs. Ambree.' 'Oh, Mr.

Mate,' says she, 'will he fetch the police?' 'Possibly,' says I, 'if he finds one on the quay.' And she began cryin' fit to break me heart."

To my surprise, the nose is still wrinkled; he breathes through his nose in a way that means "Ye don't know what's comin'."

"'Oh, I hope he won't be so cruel, Mr. Mate,' says she, cryin' as I said. 'For why?' says I, speakin' stern. 'You are an immoral wumman, Mrs. Ambree.' 'Yes,' says she, 'I know that, Mr. Mate, I know that; but it would be har-rd on me if he was to fetch Jim aboard for me.' 'Jim?' says I. 'Who in thunder's Jim, Mrs. Ambree?' ''Tis my husband,' she sobs. 'He's on night duty in this dock, an' I'm a ruined soul if he finds out.' And she set down there, Mr. McAlnwick, just where you're settin' and burst into floods o' tears."

"Dear me!" I observe. And the nose is one mass of humoursome corrugations.

"Aye, 'tis so," continues the Chief Officer, pouring out "Black and White" for two. "An' at that moment in comes Nicholas, his face serious-like, and says he, 'Mrs. Ambree, ye're wanted.' An' she goes out wi' him, like Mary Queen o' Scots to the block!"

"Mr. Honna, I'm surprised!"

"Not a bit of it, McAlnwick, not a bit of it! At

first I thought Nicholas had been a fool and fetched a policeman, but Nicholas is no fool, as ye've no doubt observed. Still, I got out an' put on me pants and went into the cabin. Passin' the Steward's door I heard voices. Enterin' the Steward's room, I saw him an' the baggage splittin' a Guinness and carryin' on! 'Twas scandalous, Mr. McAlnwick. To be done by a wire-haired, leather-skinned old reprobate like Nicholas. 'Twas a clear case, for his wife does all his washin' up at Bridgend."

"I am shocked, Mr. Honna."

"Ye may well be. I was too. Pass the water-bottle, Mr. McAlnwick."

"I hear," I observe, "I hear Alexander the Great is to have the *Petruchio* next time she comes in."

"That's the rumour, Mr. McAlnwick. *I* think there's something in it, for me wife tells me that Mrs. Alexander was lookin' at a house in Cathay only last week. 'A house,' says she, 'that will be not less than thirty pounds a year.' That means *Petruchio*, a big ship."

The above personage, you see, is the Chief, the man who wore elevators in his boots.

"But why should he move into a larger house, Mr. Honna?"

"To keep up his position in the world, Mr. McAlnwick. 'Tis a big responsibility, ye see. His youngster will now go to a—a scholastic academy while mine remain on the rates."

"How are they, Mr. Honna?"

"Fine, Mr. McAlnwick, fine! Jacko passed I don't know how many exams., and he's teaching the curate to play the organ. Hallo!"

There is a knock at the door, and I rise to lift the hook which holds it. A stout man with a short moustache and a double chin—Tenniel's Bismarck to the life—touches his cap. It is the night watchman.

"Beg pardon, sir, Mr. Honna, but I don't feel well, sir, and I wanted to know, sir, if you'd mind my goin' to get a drop o' brandy, sir?"

"Away ye go, then."

"Thank you, sir. Shan't be long, sir. Only——"

"Have ye any money?"

"Oh, *yes*, sir. Thank you all the same, sir."

I close the door, Bismarck hastens away for brandy, and the Mate's nose is covered with wrinkles. Whereby I am at liberty to conclude that there is *bunkum* in the air. I cough.

"See that man?" he says. I nod.

"Skipper of a three-masted bark once."

"Yes?"

"He was!"

"What brought him down to night watchman at thirty shillings a week?"

"Bad health. He was always feelin' unwell, and he was tradin' between Liverpool and Bordeaux."

The Mate nods at me to emphasise his words, while I look at him gravely.

"An' now," adds my friend the Mate, "I must turn out and see he comes back."

"I'll do that—don't bother. So he's one of the derelicts?"

"His brother was another. Died mad, over at Landore. Ever hear of Mad Robin? Well, he was Chief of a boat carryin' cotton to Liverpool. Comin' home from Savannah, dropped her propeller in mid-ocean."

"Shipped his spare one?" Mr. Honna laughs shortly.

"Didn't carry spares in that company, Mr. McAlnwick. No, he made one."

"Made one! How?"

"Out of a block of hornbeam and the plates of one of his bulkheads. Knocked about for a month waitin' for fine weather, tipped the ship, fixed his tin-pot screw on, and started 'slow ahead.' Came in under her own steam, Second Engineer in com-

mand, Chief under restraint in his berth. Died over at Landore—D.T."

With which abrupt epitaph the Mate reaches for his pants, while I, knocking out my pipe, go away to turn in.

XXIX

But I cannot sleep. Something lies at the back of my brain—a dull anxiety, hardly definable to myself. It is possible that I may see her again, when I come home once more. I shall know for certain in the morning. And yet it may so happen that it is indeed finished. Nay, nay, my friend, have patience. I can see you as you read this, storming about the room, dropping red cigarette ash on the carpet, visibly perturbed in your mind at my madness.

Yes, yes, I know I forswore it all in a moment of bitter cynicism. But, *mon ami*, I am a man—a very irregularly balanced man, too, I often think—and there rises from my soul an exceeding bitter cry sometimes. You see here my life—barmaid society, ship's tittle-tattle, unending rough toil. To have but one hold, one haven, one star to guide—canst blame me, *mon ami*, if I hold desperately to a tiny hope?

Thinking this out, I walk far out to the pier-head, beneath the harbour light, and look earnestly into

the darkness covering the sea. Have pity, at least, old friend, when I write in pain.

"Worth how well, those dark grey eyes,
That hair so dark and dear, how worth,
That a man should strive and agonise,
And taste a very hell on earth
For the hope of such a prize!"

To which your much-tried patience replies merely, "Humph!" I suppose? But, old friend, is it not true? Have I not heard your own voice give way a little, your own hand falter with the eternal cigarette as some long-hidden memory swept across your mind? So I believe, and so I understand the terse silence when you rise abruptly from the piano in the middle of some sad, low improvisation, and I lose you in the smoke-laden darkness of the room. Life for us moderns has its difficulties at times, life being, as it were, anything but modern. We have so many gods, not all of them false, either; but the Voice of the Dweller in the Innermost brings their temples crashing about our ears, and we are homeless, godless, atheists indeed.

I do not think this problem has been solved for us yet. It is all very well for the orthodox to say sneeringly, "Why not believe, like us? Why stand outside the pearly gates, while Love and Lovers pace beneath the trees that grow by the River of Life?

So easy, *mes amis!* Only believe. Do not delay, but come. Why not to-night?" We are further from yon purple-crowned heights than you wot of, good friends. Between us and that golden radiance lie many miles of dusty road, lies even the Valley of the Shadow, through which we have passed. And now, as we are emerging from that same Valley, out upon the broad high tablelands of Understanding, we turn and see the distant loveliness, and we halt and stumble, and (sometimes) lose our way.

"She should never have looked on me,
If she meant I should not love her!
There are plenty—men, you call such,
I suppose—she may discover
All her soul to, if she pleases,
And yet leave much as she found them:
But I'm not so, and she knew it
When she fixed me, glancing round them."

XXX

CHAINS rattling, winches groaning, sun shining, longshoremen shouting, breezes blowing.

"God's in His heaven—
All's right with the world."

And the dock postman (dear old Postie, who cadges sticks of hard tobacco and cigars from us

when he brings good news) is standing on the quay while the ship is being moved into her new berth, and he waves a batch of letters when he sees me looking towards him. So! I have been burrowing in our boilers, testing the scale, inspecting stays and furnace crowns, and the joy of working has come back to me. I was solemn last evening, melancholic and somewhat metaphysical it seems; but let it stand. 'Tis morning, and Postie's on the quay.

I breakfast alone. The others are ashore, but they will appear during the day to finish up and to bestow mementoes on the wretched one they leave behind. And so I sit smoking my pipe by the mess-room fire; Postie descends, beaming expectantly. He hands me two letters, one from my friend, one from——

There was a thick mist before my eyes, the fire seemed an infinitely distant red blur, and Postie, several continents away, was burbling about possible promotions, good voyage, fine weather, tobacco, and the like. Forgive me, old man, but your letter lay unopened for a while. I poured tobacco and cigars into Postie's pockets, and sat down to think things out. Was it foolish of me to sit down to think? To set down the problem thus: Here am I, a man of infinite, almost unknowable latent possibilities, suddenly repossessed of the supreme power and glory

of life. How can I, by taking thought, bring out those same possibilities, make them actual and patent to the world, apply them to the highest and noblest uses, and so justify myself before men? In some such manner did I put to my own soul the position, trying ever to keep in view the sanctity, the holiness of life, and the preciousness of its holiest of holies, where dwell, as I have said, the power and the glory.

It is late in the evening of this most momentous day, and I must put down my pen, but there is one thought which perhaps may serve as answer to the scepticism so often expressed when I asserted my belief in this world after all. I mean if a man, when he experiences some transcendent joy, is prompted to express that joy in terms of nobler effort and sterner consecration to the welfare of others—does not this fact lead him to infer that happiness is, at least, more natural than unhappiness? that the universe does indeed exist, in Emerson's phrase, "hospitably for the weal of souls"? That, in fine, when the majority turn their faces this way, first keeping the houses of their souls swept and garnished for the love they are awaiting, then will the mountain of our misery be levelled, our valleys of despair filled up, and the rough places of life made plain?

So, at least, it seems to me just now as I sit and write. How I long for a talk with my friend!

"You're my friend!
What a thing friendship is, world without end!"

XXXI

I was awakened by something rattling outside my open window-port, wakened to a small tragedy. A circular wire rat-trap, depending from a line held by someone on the poop, and containing two frantic rats, dangled against the opening Alas how they ran round and round and round! The cause of all their agony, a piece of decayed fish and a fragment of mouldy cheese, was left untouched as they dangled before me. The voice of my friend the Mate is audible down my ventilator. He is arguing with the Steward, one Nicholas, of whom you have heard. Said Nicholas is protesting in his clickety Graeco-English fashion, that the pelt of a drowned rat (*dronded raht*, Nicholas loquitur) is worth less than that of one skinned alive. To which horrible doctrine my friend the Mate opposes a blustering Irish humaneness issuing in "Dammit, ye shan't!" Rat, meanwhile dangling, they as well as their fate hanging uncertain. At last they are lowered. (The Mate talking, I think, over his shoulder at Nicholas,

who stands, probably in contemplative fashion, legs apart, face serious, brain calculating income derivable from rats skinned alive.) The line rising in a minute, I turn on my elbow to witness the end. Alas! *Hélas!!* *Ach Himmel!!!* How are the mighty fallen! Two grey shining lumps, each with tapering tail dropped limply through the bottom; fish, cheese, and rodents all on one dead level now, given over to corruption. Up, up—I hear the trap grounded on the poop over my head. I sigh as I climb out and wash. I rather like rats. The Grey One in the tunnel is an old chum of mine. I have never killed one yet, though often even Grey One has been chased up and down, in fun. He, sitting on a stringer and twirling his whiskers, has "views," I think, about Men with Sticks, *his* conception of the Devil and all his angels.

John Thomas, bursting in with hot water for shaving and information concerning breakfast in the cabin, interrupts my rat-reverie. It is Sunday morning.

"Eight o'clock, sir. Steward say, sir, will you have breakfast with the Chief Officer?"

"No one else aboard?"

"Second Officer's in the galley, sir."

"Where?"

"Galley, sir." A snigger from John Thomas. "Come aboard early, sir."

"Oh! Tell the Steward 'Yes, with pleasure.'"

So! I finish dressing leisurely, donning patrol-jacket and uniform cap, and "turn out." It is a calm Sabbath morning. Not yet have the mists rolled from the heights which frown upon us all around, but the sun glitters on the docked shipping, silent save for the flapping of sea gulls and the clank of some fresh-water pump. With a glance of homage towards the sun, I go below for my inspection. Boilers, fires banked in the donkey-boilers over week-end, bilges, sea-cocks all in order; I am at liberty to enjoy my day of rest. Nicholas, in white drill coat, shining silver buttons, and shore-boots of burnished bronze hue, glides aft with a dish (held high, in the professional manner) covered with a dome of gleaming pewter. Two youths on the quay, fishing hopelessly for insignificant dock carp, watch with open-mouthed awe. My own buttons of yellow metal, linen collar, and badge *de rigueur*, pass a similar scrutiny as I follow him to the saloon.

The saloon, compared with our own quarters, is sumptuously furnished. Panelled in hard woods, white ceiling with shining nickel rods and brackets, carpeted floor and ruby-plush upholstering—into such a palace I step to take breakfast with my friend the Mate. He is already entrenched behind the pewter dome, Nicholas gliding round giving the final

touch of art to the preparations. The subject of skinned rats has vanished to make room for the serious business of his life.

"Good-mornin', Mr. McAlnwick. Sit there! We are alone to-day, as ye see. Nicholas!"

Nicholas is a believer in ritual. He is tolling his little brass hand-bell just as though everyone was here. In a minute he reappears.

"Sir?"

"Is Mr. Hammerton aboard?" A snigger from John Thomas, installed *pro tem.* in the pantry as the Steward's aide-de-camp.

"'S in de galley, mister."

"Does he want any breakfast?"

"No, sir. 'S 'sleep in de galley." Another snigger.

"What's the matter with that boy?" thunders my friend the Mate, lifting the dome from ham and eggs.

"He is merely cursed with a sense of humour, Mr. Honna," I observe, and we avoid conversational rock and shoals until we are ensconced in his private berth.

"The fact is, Mr. McAlnwick, Mr. Hammerton's a very foolish young feller. Help yourself to some tobacco. Knowin' as I do that when he went ashore last night he had twenty-six pounds ten in his cash pocket, I wonder he isn't lyin' at the bottom o' the

dock instead of in the galley. He will *not* bank his surplus. And he *will* get drunk."

"What's at the bottom of it all, Mr. Honna?"

"I'll show ye!" With a hoarse whisper he rises, tip-toes swiftly along the corridor to the Second Officer's room, and returns with a photograph.

Baby! Is she another milestone nearer to Alsatia, then? My pipe remains unlit as I gaze at the cheap provincial photograph of a girl with large eyes and a sensuous mouth.

Mr. Honna pushes his cap back and stares at me.

"What! D'ye know her?"

"It's Baby," I answer, laying the thing down. "Baby!"

"He's engaged to her."

"Since when?"

"Since—Gawd knows—last Monday, I believe."

I reach for the matches, and recount to the Mate my knowledge of Baby. His nose wrinkles up, his eyes diminish to steel-blue points of fire, and he nods his head slowly to my tale.

"Same old yarn. Oh, Mr. McAlnwick, are there not queer things come in with the tide? Now listen, while I tell ye. 'Tis what they all do. They dangle round bars, all at loose ends, they get their master's tickets, and they marry barmaids. Then when the command comes along, the woman keeps

the man down in the mud. 'Twas with me, too. I was engaged to a Nova Scotia girl—two Nova Scotia girls—different times. I'd roll round town, givin' 'em to understand I was master, take 'em out drivin' in a buggy Sunday evenin', makin' a fool o' meself fine. When the crash came—oh, Mr. McAlnwick, make use of your advantages now yer're at sea!—when the crash came, we were just ready to sail, an' I stayed by the ship. But next time 'twould be the same. I couldn't be acquainted with a girl for a week without proposin' matrimony! Mr. McAlnwick, ye mustn't laugh. 'Tis the truth. Even now—but why talk? Ye know my sympathetic nature. But this seems to be serious. So she's the barmaid at the Stormy Petrel, is she? Humph!"

"His brains must be addled," I observe, "not to see——"

"Ah! but ye're young, Mr. McAlnwick! *That's* no hindrance in the worrld to—to such as him. *Oh*, dear no!"

"Then such as he have a very low standard of morality."

"Mr. McAlnwick, now listen. When ye've been sent to sea at twelve year old as apprentice, an' ploughed the oceans of the worrld for five years in the foc'sle, when ye've been bullied an' damned by

fifty different skippers on fifty different trades as third and second mate, when ye've split yer head studyin' for yer ticket, when ye've got it and ye're glad to go second mate at seven pounds ten a month, when ye see men o' less merit promoted because they marry skippers' daughters while you are walkin' the bridge—what 'ud ye do?"

"I don't know, mister." I am taken aback by the velocity of the question, by the Mate's earnestness.

"Ye'd turn callous or religious, or go mad! Ye see, Mr. McAlnwick, there's a lot ye miss, though ye won't admit it. Ye come to sea and ye meet the cloth, but ye don't realise their trainin'. Ye laugh at us for our queer ways, such as never walkin' on the poop over the Skipper's head, never askin' for another helpin', never arguin' the point, an' such like. But consider that man's trainin'! Ye cannot? Ye've been brought up ashore, ye've had opportunities for studyin' and conversin' with edyecated people, an' ye're frettin' for some young lady, as I can see—don't deny it, I saw Postie bring the letter—and ye wouldn't touch the likes o' *this* with a pair o' tongs. But with Mr. Hammerton 'tis different, do ye not see?"

"Yes, I see, a little. But you yourself, now——"

"Me? Oh, 'twas a special providence preserved me, Mr. McAlnwick. I was waitin' for a command

at the time, and I was unable to get out o' the bargain. But ye know my wife."

Now, there is no doubt in my mind, after some thought, that the Chief Officer was right in insisting on the unspanned gulf between the old style officer and the men of our sphere. Heavenly powers! What have I not seen, now that the Mate has reminded me? The fatuous ignorance, the bigoted conceit, the nauseous truckling to "the Old Man," the debased intellect. And yet the Second Officer does not always lie in drunken stupor on the galley bench. I call to mind a time when he took a violin and played to me as the sun went down across the foam-flecked sea. Let us remember him by that rather than by his present state, and leave the rest to God.

XXXII

It is, I think, an inestimable privilege to claim the friendship of a man whose life and letters are a perpetual stimulus to action, an invariable provocative of thought. I have just had a letter from my friend, telling me that he is in despair of the stage. His play is a thing of the past, and he vows that he has done with dramatic art for ever.

Now being, like Goldsmith, a person who spends much time in taverns and coffee-houses, where one

can study every conceivable shade of character, I took my friends' letter up town with me, and sat down to muse over it and a tankard of ale. It was a cosy bar, cosier than the Cheshire Cheese, if more modern; I sank back in a deep lounge and watched the world go round.

To commence, I thought to myself, these people here constitute a potential public for a play. Therefore, supposing it were *my* play, my attitude towards them is a factor in the dramatic problem. What is my definition, my analysis of this potential public?

Well, they are all engaged in a terrific struggle for *safety*. They have no social instinct apart from the instinct to combine for *safety*. Their ideal is a tradesman, a pedlar, who has accumulated sufficient wealth to be safe from poverty. Their ideal of religion is one which guarantees safety from hell. They do not believe, and they tell you bluntly they do not believe, any man who claims to be an altruist. They do not believe any man who protests that he does not worship wealth—*i.e.*, safety.

By this time I was puzzled to know how to answer my friend's complaints. All I knew was that, to strike one blow on the metal and drop the hammer because it jarred his fingers, argues sloth, not the "artistic temperament." Oh, *mon ami*, that "artistic temperament." "Is this all? Up again!" If

you are discouraged I can only suggest a course of reading in the lives of dramatists. I recall a few off-hand—Lessing, Molière, Scribe, Wagner, Ibsen, these will suffice. When did *they* stop and fold their hands in despair? As for the Elizabethan and Restoration playwrights, their facility of invention, their exuberance under difficulties is devastating. That, however, is not your problem. Your drama of to-day is an old bottle with no wine in it. You fail because words have ceased to have any definite meaning. The words in a man's mouth bear as little relation to his emotions as the architecture of his house bears to his ideas. Words like Love, God, Faith, and Soul are mere coloured balloons floating about the modern West End stage. It is easy to be horrified at such a view, but men like me, who deal with *things*, are not to be humbugged. You put a man in a commonplace predicament, and you make him say tragically, "The die is cast," or "I will see him hanged first," or "All is over between us." That is not drama; it is nonsense. Dies are rarely cast nowadays, public hangings have been abolished, and salaries rule too low to risk breach of promise actions. There's your dilemma. Write me a play in which every word is *meant*—the drama will look after itself. But, if you will allow a young man to suggest a point, I say that you are all working in the

dark; you are groping blindly forward when you might rejoice in the sunlight. And now, with my colleagues as texts, I shall read a homily on the conditions of modern dramatic art.

The division of biped mammalia into merely men and women is of comparatively recent date. In very early times, however, when wisdom was commoner than now, the classification began with gods and goddesses, heroes, men and women, with lower types like fauns and satyrs. I venture to think that this nomenclature might with advantage be revived. From time to time, in the history of the human mind since *Anno Domini*, one sees efforts to differentiate, generally with scant success. The Roman Catholic Church, with her elaborate canonising machinery, stands as the most prosperous example of this, though with the vital fault of postponing the sanctifying till after death. She, again, is responsible for another attempt, viz., the infallibility of her ministers, a promising enough plan, but ill regulated. The Stuart *régime*, urging with unpleasant vigour the divinity of kingship and the corresponding caddishness (or decadence) of much of the rest of mankind, is a signal example of how my plan should not be carried out. Carlyle's heroes are mostly supermen; individuals, not types.

Now, I suggest to you that we agree to classify my

colleagues, the masters of the mighty vapour, the beings who are the real cloud-compellers of our day, as heroes. If I mistake not, I have a prior claim to the word, too, in that Hero's engine is the type of all our modern prime movers, the supreme type to which we are ever striving to approximate. Masters of the vapour-driven sphere! Not men, but heroes, having their own thoughts, their own joys and sorrows, their own gods; more than men, in that they need less than men, less than gods, in that they owe allegiance to them.

Well, then, here is your dramatic problem. Until you recognise the fact that such beings as I have indicated do actually inhabit the earth and cover the sea with their handiwork, until you consider the tremendous fact that your world's work is done by heroes, and not by politicians and commercial travellers, that, in short, your intellectual Frankensteins have made a million-brained monster whom you cannot, dare not destroy, your drama will not be a living force. I hold out no hope that the problem is easy of solution; I only know it exists. You will first of all become as little children, and learn, as best you may, what makes the wheels go round. Learn, that you may teach, by your creative art. Above all, remember, when you rise to protest that I am forgetting Nature, that together with "the way

of an eagle in the air, and the way of a serpent upon a rock," the Hebrew poet has joined "the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid."

XXXIII

I HAVE been up town "to meeting," as my father used to say. The air was clear and warm when my friend the Mate appeared on deck in all the splendour of "shore gear." He affects a material which never wears out. "Mr. McAlnwick, these here are the pants I was married in!" He reserves his serious thoughts for underwear, of which he carries a portentous quantity to last a voyage. Smart young cadets, who never wear the same collar twice, and sport white shirts and soiled souls in seamen's missions, are the Mate's aversion. He has severe censures for "gallivantin'" and "dressin' for show." He approves of my own staid habits of life, after the fashion of those elderly folk who admire in others what they so sadly lacked in their own spring-time. He forgets that perhaps even I have trembled with rage because there was a spot on my collar, that even I may have spent precious moments folding and pressing a favourite pair of trousers.

The Mate does not often go ashore nowadays, even to missions, and so the lavendery smell which

exhales from the historic pants scarcely has time to dissipate before they are back in the chest. Different now, from his young days, when the vessel lay alongside the *Quai de la Bourse* in Rouen City, and my friend stepped across each evening to the Café Victor to drink *crème de menthe* and feel that listening to the band was rather wicked and altogether Continental. Indeed, his attachment to the ship is now proverbial, the prevailing feeling having been brilliantly epitomised by himself. "If I wash me face," he snapped to me one day; "If I wash me face, they think I'm goin' ashore!" But now the decent double-breasted blue serge, the trim beard and black bowler hat are in evidence; my friend the Mate is about to attend divine service at the Seamen's Mission. My own appearance in *mufti* causes excitement.

"Ye're comin', Mr. McAlnwick?"

"As far as the door," I reply.

The Chief Officer's blue eyes glint as he wrinkles his nose.

"'Tis my opinion, Mr. McAlnwick, that ye've a young woman in the town yerself."

And we go forth into the town. At the door of the Mission I bid the Mate farewell, and I catch a last glimpse of him as he removes his hat and wipes his boots with the diffidence apparently interwoven in

the fibre of all mariners ashore. He is not of a proselytising disposition. Strong Orangeman, an Ulster Protestant, and—the rest. So, thinking of him, I fare onward, watching the show. Men and maidens idly saunter along, or hasten to the house of God. Why, I wonder, do girls of religious disposition allow themselves so little time to dress? Two or three have passed me; one had a button loose at the back of her dress; another's "stole" of equivocal lace was unsymmetrically adjusted to her shoulders; and so on. I know that God looketh not on the outward semblance, but I am also painfully aware that young men are *not* fashioned after their Creator in that respect, and my desire to see everybody married is outraged by these omissions. And looking into the faces of my fellow-passengers this Sunday evening, I am led to think that, as a class, girls are not very beautiful objects when they lack refinement. I see much raw material around me which might possibly be hewn into lovely shape—but—— To my friend, with his intellectual Toryism, this hiatus is quite reasonable. These lower classes, he will observe sublimely, have their functions; refinement is not for all. And the *St. James's Gazette* rustles comfortably as he sinks back into the saddle-bags again!

Well, let me be honest in this matter. My mind is still in a fluid state concerning theories of society.

I can only generalise. I believe, with Emerson, that the world exists ultimately for the weal of souls; I believe, also, the spiritually correlative truth, the ultimate probity of those same souls, but—I have not yet discovered why I abhor contact with those who hold the same political faith. Am I misanthropic? Or unsocial? Why, when I sit resolutely down to hear my own beliefs preached, do I silently contest each point, adopt the contrary view? Why do I avoid "active propaganda," "working for the cause," and such like? Is it because I disbelieve utterly in preaching? I do that, anyway. I often think how much farther ahead we should be if no one ever preached. I do not condemn lecturing by any means. I dislike the packed audience of the conventional preacher, socialistic or otherwise. My ideal is the heterogeneous assembly, hearkening to the words of a man skilled in oratory, profound in thought, a genius in the art of the suggestive phrase. The audience in all probability would be far from clear as to his intentions; they would grow clearer as time went on and the suggestions ripened into independent speculation. If they could understand at once what he intends, they would stand in no need of his ministry.

You will perceive how unfitted I was for the meeting I attended to-night. The uppermost thought in

mind as I left was, "I do not believe in bloodless revolutions." You cannot have a revolution of society without turning part of it upside down. And I am half afraid that a good deal of what I value most in this world will be turned upside down by a socialistic revolution. Add the sad, indisputable fact that if everyone were a Socialist I should, by natural law, be a Tory, and you will see, more or less accurately, how I stand. You will see, too, the cause of my belief in heroes and gods, which latter you call natural laws. I look upon myself as a man working among gods and heroes, and I am beginning to think that the question of revolutions rests always ultimately with them, while I, a man, can but look on and marvel.

Well, I am tired with my jaunt. One's feet are not inured to walking after months at sea. And I hear my friend the Mate overhead.

"Mr. McAlnwick, ye should have been there! The *élite* o' the Mission was on show. An' we had an anthem. 'Twas good!"

I slip ashore with my letter before turning in.

XXXIV

Though I had no intention of buying many books, the dreary loneliness of the tavern where I supped

drove me out upon the streets, and insensibly I drifted towards my favourite second-hand book-shop, where the little maiden behind the mountains of Welsh theology reminds me of someone I know. My Welsh Divinity I call her, hovering bright-winged above the dust-clouds of old literature, with clear grey eyes and nervous mouth. Not "the heir of all the ages," I fear, though the potentiality in her must be infinite and beyond my ken. "What do you, oh, young man?" So I seem to read the query in her eyes. "Are you only a hodman in this book-yard, then? Where is *she?* What is *she?* Who is *she?*" As I stand and thumb the serried ranks of corpses, I feel her gaze upon me. Quite inarticulate, both of us, you understand—I as shy as she.

I must seem extraordinarily sensitive to you, I think. Merely the presence of this child stirs my soul to nobler ideals. I feel invigorated and refreshed. So my lady stirs me; so even the mere presence of some men we know. In like manner, I imagine, is my friend influenced by superb music. They affect me like an essay by Pater, a Watts portrait, or a Dulwich Cuyp, a feeling which I can only call a passionate intellectualism, a loosening of corporeal encumbrances. My friend will not carp because I seem to place my love for my mistress in a category with a Dutch landscape and an aesthetic essay—he will understand.

I have no desire to be proud, but I confess I have never appreciated that amorousness which prompts the lovers to exchange hats as well as vows. Indeed, I scarcely understand what the older poets mean by vows even. What are these vows? By whom are they kept? Of what avail are they when they are most needed? Nearly as useless as marriage vows, these of the trysting-place, I fancy. You hold up your hands in horror at this, not because you disagree, but because of my audacity in applying general modernisms to myself. Well, I am tired of people who pose as advanced thinkers and remain as conventional as ever. We have outgrown so much of the sentimentalism of Love that muddle-headed moderns imagine that we have outgrown Love itself. The keynote of everything worthy in modern life and art and philosophy is—restraint. I decline to regard ranting as eloquence because the Elizabethan ranted well, and I decline also to accept the Shakesperian conception of Love, viz., physical satiety, as the very latest thing in ideals.

Restraint, then! A marriage is doubtless, as Chesterton so admirably puts it, a passionate compromise, but it does not follow that love is therefore a compromising debauchery. It may be that I, who have my ways far from feminine influence, tend to place women in a rarer and purer atmosphere than

most of them breathe, and that this tendency unfits me for judging them accurately. Let it be so. Let my Welsh Divinity watch me from beyond the dust-clouds of learning with her grey eyes, while I pray never to lose my reverence for the quiet loveliness of which she is, so unconsciously, the type.

XXXV

Once more I am out at sea. I have stowed away my "shore gear," slipped the movable bar across my bookshelf, screwed up my windows, and made all snug against the wind blowing up-Channel. There is a gentle roll; she is in ballast, for the Western Ocean, and the Mate does not smile when we discuss the probable weather. He would like a little more ballast, I know, and he thinks she "draws too much forrard." Well, I am minded to go on deck for a smoke before I turn in. And the Third Officer is on watch.

I call him the Innovation. There is to be much tallying on this charter, and there is a happy rumour that the *Benvenuto* will pay in future. "I hear," said my friend the Mate, "I hear, Mr. McAlnwick, that she has been reconstructed." By which he means that certain financial props have been introduced into her economy, and she is no longer in

liquidation. The Mate glories in a four-hour watch, and the Innovation takes the eight to twelve.

He walks across the bridge with a dozen swift strides. Then a peculiar slew of his active little frame, and he whirls back to starboard. His keen, clean-shaven face, hardened prematurely into an expression of relentless ferocity, looks out from the peak of his badge-cap, the strap cramming the crown against his bullet head. He is twenty-two, and pure Liverpool. He served his apprenticeship in sail on the Australian and Western American coasts. A middle-class education is submerged beneath seven years at sea, seven years of unbridled lust, seven years of the seven deadly sins, seven years of joyous and impenitent animalism.

There is no break in his voice when he speaks of "his old lady"—she is religious. His "old man" is "a hard case," another name for a Liverpool skipper. He met his brother this time at home—"didn't know him, mister. Hadn't seen him for six years." His knowledge of some things extends from Sydney and Melbourne to Marseilles and Hamburg, from Amsterdam to Valparaiso; he drinks Irish neat, and his conversation is blistered from end to end with blasphemous invocations of the name of the Son of God.

I do not overdraw this picture of one who is only a

type of thousands. It is impossible to give any adequate specification of him. He takes me, metaphorically, by the throat, and I am helpless. With vivid strokes he paints me scene after scene, episode after episode, of his life in "a windbag," and I see that he exaggerates not at all. He candidly admits that, in his opinion, Marseilles is heaven and Georgia the other extreme. He passed for second mate a month ago, collected half a dozen shipmates, and terminated the orgies in the police-court.

The psychology of such a soul fascinates me. I hold to my cardinal doctrine of the illimitable virtue latent in all men; and I am right. The unspeakable anathemas he pronounces on a certain skipper, who let one of his apprentices die in a West Coast "hospital," his own terrific descent into the Chilean "common grave," groping for the body among the rotten corpses, feeling for the poor lad's breast, where hung a broken rouble, token of some bygone Black Sea passion—all this tells me that I am right. Stark materialist though he is, he looks with scared awe upon the mysteries of religion, and the denunciations of the Dream on Patmos make him hope and pray that his own end may come in a deep sleep.

We are out beyond the Scillies now, and the Atlantic stretches before us in a grey, ominous immensity. The wind is rising steadily as I turn in,

and the ship is rolling deep. The waves loom up, white-crested, snap sullenly, and surge away aft. A deeper roll, the sea crashes against my ports, and I screw them tighter. I think we are to have a bad night of it. As I draw my curtain I catch sight of a letter on my drawer-top, and I sink back with a sigh of content. "A grey eye or so!"

XXXVI

I FEEL strangely to-night, and I cannot sleep. As I woke, Six Bells, eleven o'clock, was striking, half carried away by the wind. For the storm is rising, and a beam sea sends wave after wave against my ports. Now and then, in the lulls, I feel the race of the propeller as she rises from the water, sending vast tremors through the frame of the empty ship. How she rolls! In my thwart-ship bunk I slide up and down, and the green seas thunder over my head repeatedly. As I turn out I feel excited. North Atlantic, light ship.

The mess-room is silent, dark. To and fro on the floor there washes a few inches of water. The stove-pipe has been carried away, and the sea has flooded the stove. The solid teak door at the top of the companion groans as the tons of water are hurled against it. The brass lamp glimmers in the darkness,

creaking as it swings. Against the white wall the Steward's whiter apron sways like a ghost, fluttering in some eddy of draught. In the tiny pantry the cups clink softly on their hooks. And outside the storm-wind whistles in demoniac fury.

Across the room a narrow slit of light shows where the Fourth's room is hooked ajar. I go across and peer in. He is on watch, of course, and there is no one there. But all round I see littered the belongings of George's successor. A quiet, likeable Glasgow laddie, as I know him yet. He has put up his bunk curtains, and as they sway I catch a glimpse of a portrait. And so? Who can blame me if I look searchingly into the eyes of the girl with ribbon in her hair and a silver cross on her breast? And just beneath the narrow gold frame, swinging on a screw, there is a coloured paper design, which I know emanates from the Order of the Sacred Heart. It is an indulgence for one hundred days, and it has been blessed by the Vicar of Christ. Yes, and the laddie will have one on his breast, next the skin, as he stands by the throttle down below. And when we are half a world away from the parish church, he will be mindful of the tonsured man who gave him these; he will read the little red Prayer Book, and he will be ill at ease on Friday when we pass him the salt fish.

Glancing at an old cigar-box full of letters, I go out softly and hook the door.

For all the darkness and the rushing water it is close, and I go up and struggle desperately with the teak door, biding my time until the waters surge back to the rail. The door crashes to again, and I struggle on to the poop. To my amazement there are men here, four of them at the wheel. And my friend the Mate, in oilskins and sou'wester, walking back and for'ard. I cry his name, but my voice is swept into the void. He sees me, but does not speak, only walks to and fro. To me, strung up to a tautness of sensation that almost frightens me, this silence of the Mate is horrible. I feel a pain in my chest like the pressure of a heavy weight as I look at him. And the four men toil at the wheel, for the steering chains have been carried away.

Looking for'ard, I see on the well-deck the white wreckage of a boat, and I begin to tremble with excitement. If the Mate would only speak! A thought strikes me—that he will never speak to me again; then the sea comes. As she rolls to starboard, the great wave lifts his head and springs like a wild beast at the rail. A hoarse roar, a rending, splitting sound of gear going adrift, and the sea strikes the poop with terrific impact. Then the water soughs away through the scuppers. And athwart the

blackened sky there darts a dazzling flash of lightning. As I hold to my stanchion, soaked to the skin, I watch the wrath of God on the face of the waters.

Making a rush, I gain the shelter of the canvas screen round the cabin companion, and I bump into the Innovation. From beneath the dripping sou'-wester his small, keen face peers up at me, and he utters his inevitable blasphemy. He hugs his left hand to his side. "Mister!" he hisses in my ear, "for the love of Christ get me a scarf out o' me berth. It's a blue one, in the top drawer." Then, darting out for a moment, he yells "Ai!" boiling over into asterisks. He darts in again, hugging his hand. My foot is in the door, and together we wrench it open. I drop down the companion and turn into his berth for the scarf.

It is while coming back that I see into the cabin, and I halt. The Skipper is standing under the lamp holding out his hand for a cup of coffee. And Nicholas, the fears and imaginings of a volatile race blanching his wizened features, rocks unsteadily across the floor. The big man with the white hair, red face, and cold blue eyes, towers over him, those same eyes snapping with something that has nought to do with money-making or Brixton, something not mentioned in any Board of Trade regulations.

And Nicholas, holding by the table, looks like a rat in a trap, shaking with the fear of sudden death. A word from the Skipper, and he turns and runs a zig-zag course for the door. He cannot see me in the darkness, but I hear him whinnying a song to steady his nerves:

"'Ess, a young maid's broken-'earted
When a ship is outward bound."

His face is pinched and drawn, his beady eyes move unceasingly, and I think of one who said, "His nose was as sharp as a pen, and 'e babbled of green fields."

* * * * *

As I go below to my berth again, striving with the door as with a strong man, there crackles and hisses a forked glare of lightning, an enormous whip driving the great white horses of the sea to madness. Onward they spring, phalanx after phalanx, while above the riot of their disintegration glints the faint yellow light of Fastnet. Far off to nor'ard, guarding Cape Clear, hidden at times by the mountainous water, veiled almost to obscurity by the flying spume, it flashes, a coastwise light. And on the eastern horizon—O wondrous sight to me!—the black pall has lifted a little from the tumbling waters, leaving a

band of yellow moonlight with one green-flashing star.

Reaching my berth once more, the terror and delight of that last glimpse is upon me. In that strange yellow rift at midnight, backing the world of dark chaos, that star of palest green, I feel a thrill of the superhuman sense which renders Turner inexplicable to Balham, and stabs the soul with demoniac joy in the Steersman's Song.

One Bell, and the pen drops from my fingers. And so, until the day break and the shadows flee away, I shall be at my post. And in the morning there will be more to tell.

THE END

THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS
GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

FANNY BUTCHER ∆ BOOKS
75 EAST ADAMS STREET
CHICAGO